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#27

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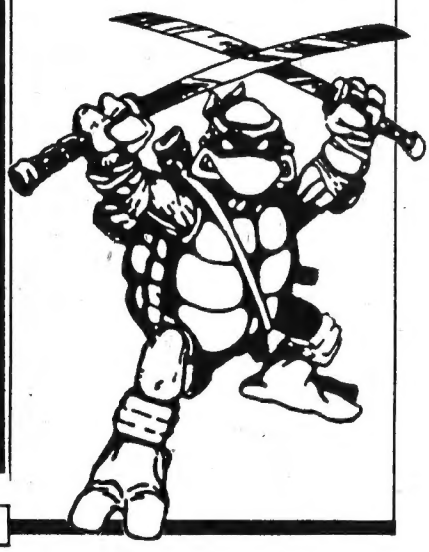

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"I like writing THE ETERNALS."

PETER B. GILLIS

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Peter B. Gillis
Occupation: Comic-book writer
Former Occupation: Student and wastrel *(Laughter.)*
Born: 19 December 1952 — White Plains, NY
Residence: Chicago, IL, and proud of it.
Credits: Currently: DOCTOR STRANGE, THE ETERNALS, THE DEFENDERS, and THE MICRONAUTS for Marvel, and BLAZE BARLOW AND THE ETERNITY COMMAND in FIRST ADVENTURES for First. Future: MORITURI for Marvel. Past: THE BLACK FLAME in STARSLAYER, SHATTER and WARP for First. Also, a great many fill-ins and one-shot stories for Marvel, for series including CAPTAIN AMERICA, THE INCREDIBLE HULK, WHAT IF?, MASTER OF KUNG FU, MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE, MARVEL FANFARE, IRON MAN (two annuals), and JOHN CARTER, WARLORD OF MARS. There were also the one-shots (so far): CALEB HAMMER (in MARVEL PREMIERE) and SILHOUETTE (in BIZARRE ADVENTURES).
Favorite Comics: Classics: Lee and Kirby's FANTASTIC FOUR and THOR, Lee and Ditko's DOCTOR STRANGE, Fox and Infantino's ADAM STRANGE. Current: AMERICAN FLAGG, AZTEC ACE, MOONSHADOW, NEMO, SABRE, SWAMP THING.
Favorite Novel: Henry James' THE GOLDEN BOWL
Favorite Music: European space rock
Favorite Food: Too many to mention here.
Ideal of Beauty in Women: Magic.
Interests: Literature, music of all sorts, science, things intellectual.
Ambition: To have an enigmatic entry in the ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITTANICA.

"You had Stan Lee, the Homer of comic

Before you read this interview, I want to correct a widespread belief held in the world of comics. The interviewee, Peter Gillis, and the interviewer, Peter Sanderson, are not — repeat not *— the same person. Yes, it is true that we are both practically the same age, that we are both incurable academics with majors in literature, and that our tastes in comics overlap to a large extent. But we are* not *the same person! No, no, no. He's got a beard; I don't. I'm quite thin; he's not. I wear glasses; he doesn't. But whenever we both happen to be at, say, the Marvel offices at the same time, someone always calls "Peter!" and we* both *turn around simultaneously, each assuming that the caller wants him. And sometimes even the person calling "Peter" isn't sure. A noted comics writer (all right, it was Chris Claremont) once looked right at me and referred to me as Peter Gillis. (Bill Mantlo keeps mistaking me for Kurt Busiek, but that's another story.) Peter Gillis, on the other hand, has been told to his face that he is the one who read the entire DC library (but, no, that was me, and I have the papers committing me to Arkham Asylum for a rest cure to prove it). Eventually Marvel will simplify the problem of multiple Peters with their forthcoming series CRISIS ON INFINITE PETERS, after which there will only be one Peter left. (This will ensure we're not confused with Peter David, either.) Marvel will still have the problem of multiple Jims and multiple Mikes and multiple Bobs to contend with — but first things first, right?*

As for Peter Gillis, apart form any other Peters, he has been writing for Marvel for quite a number of years now, but it is only in the last few years that he has been doing series work on a regular basis. As I write this, the first issue of THE ETERNALS limited series he is doing with artist Sal Buscema is about to go on sale, which looks to be a worthy successor to the greatly underrated original ETERNALS series that Jack Kirby did in the 1970s. Gillis is beginning work on DOCTOR STRANGE, and winding up runs on THE DEFENDERS and THE MICRONAUTS, two long-running series that he pushed in interesting new directions. He is preparing a new series, MORITURI, for Marvel, to which his remarks in this interview about how to handle death in comics will prove relevant, and is launching a weird futuristic adventure strip, BLAZE BARLOW AND THE ETERNITY COMMAND, in First's new FIRST ADVENTURES anthology series.

Peter Gillis brings to his work, and to this interview, the perspective of a person who has been a comics fan and who is now a professional, and can see comics from both viewpoints, and the perspective of an intellectual who comprehends the strengths of comics as contemporary myth and as an artistic medium, and yet can also enjoy them as great entertainment. His comics work expresses a personal vision while attempting to recapture the sense of wonder, and often of fun as well, that first attracts a person to comics. This interview was conducted during one of Gillis's frequent trips to New York City from his home based in Chicago.

PETER SANDERSON: *What do you try to do as a writer to make a good comic book?*

PETER GILLIS: What I try to do is take my characters and stretch them, reveal as much as I can about them, and take those insights, and bring them out. I want the characters to be more fully themselves than they were before. Very often I will do a story that revolves around an image, and the image has to be striking and emblematic of the strip I'm doing. For my very first published story, which turned out to be CAPTAIN AMERICA #224, all of a sudden I came up with the image of Captain America floating in the East River, being picked up, going into a bathroom, taking off his mask, and discovering that there was a face he didn't recognize under the mask. That was the image. I then had to build a story around that. The ultimate identity crisis. I will get a center like that and work around it. Sometimes, though not as often, it will be an intellectual idea. But I always want to do a story that has a center, that can either be a message that I want to say, or simply an image that stuck with me, and I want to convey it so it will stick with the reader, or sometimes just a feeling. What I try to do is make the comic memorable. And it should be a *story*. It should convey a single impression, whether it be intellectual, visual, or just the ambiance of the book. There should be something each issue that should make people remember it, and have it lodge in them.

PETER S.: *How did you get into reading comics?*

PETER G.: It's kind of curious, because I don't really know. I cannot remember a time when I did not know how to read. I was reading comics as soon as they were offered to me, mainly adventure comics. I would read anything that was shoved into my hands: BABY HUEY or ADAM STRANGE (in MYSTERY IN SPACE). ADAM STRANGE was my favorite childhood comic. I was scared shitless by the **Kirby** monster books, but I didn't know Marvel did them. Diablo, who was a cloud creature — I was scared by him. Titano was a giant crab — I was scared by him. I later collected those. I have "Googam, Son of Goom," which I think is probably a real height of name in invention in comics. I've always been reading them. They were like mother's milk to me. I discovered Marvel later. Comics were as close to me as the television.

PETER S.: *Why is that?*

PETER G.: They were very vivid, they were easy to read, plus they had the fantasy I was always drawn to, the large horizons. I was a science-fiction reader throughout elementary school and high school, and I was very, very deeply steeped in it. I was also a science major. To me, science fiction was *the* literature. I would read mainstream literature, and

culture, and Roy Thomas, our Virgil."

I would wait for something to happen in those books, and nothing ever did. There was no significant alteration of reality; they never left the planet; aliens never showed up.

PETER S.: *This is not a Henry James fan we have here.*

PETER G.: I *became* a **Henry James** fan, but definitely not in elementary school. SF and fantasy and science were what I lived on. I was a science whiz kid, and by all indications, was going to become a top flight physicist or something like that, and somehow something went wrong, and I ended up in comics.

PETER S.: *So you became a student of German medievalist literature in college and graduate school, and are now A.B.D. — All But Dissertation.*

PETER G.: Actually, I have one exam left to take. One of these days. I was entranced by science's advances, and by the chance for the expanding horizons that science gave. But when I got into college and started being taught by physicists and chemists, I found out what science is like. It's a terribly unromantic field. I had been reading textbooks and these wonderful theories, and then finally had it come to me that it took 25 years of slogging through really tedious experiments and calculations to get to these really exciting theories. It's a different sort of thing from just sitting there and going "Wow!" And I realized it was the spiritual implications, if you will, of what was being done in science that attracted me. And the fantasy. I found dealing with the fantastic, the borders of the unknown, to be one of my main interests, and that's why I turned to studying Arthurian romances.

PETER S.: *Could you compare the Arthurian mythos of legends with the Marvel Comics mythos?*

PETER G.: There are structural similarities because Marvel's world is open-ended. It is a world that is continually being added to at a rapid rate. There has been a decline of cohesiveness for a large number of reasons. But there is still the magnificent scope to it, and the fact that so many people contributed to it really makes it quite an accomplishment. It wasn't just complicated; it was large. By contrast, the DC universe is extremely complicated, but doesn't have the sense of scale that Marvel's does.

PETER S.: *Because Marvel has more of a cosmic scope?*

PETER G.: Things that dwarf the human scale. One example is the first Galactus story in THE FANTASTIC FOUR. An alien comes down and says, "I'm going to suck up all the energy on the planet," and the heroes try to stop him. That's also the plot of 500,000 DC comics. In DC's case the guy would be green and be about 6 feet tall, and they'd defeat him by making him say his name backwards. I'm really talking about the old **Mort Weisinger** era, you understand. Nothing really violated the sense of scale in the DC universe. Superman was a human being, just like everybody else, and he flew across the universe in about five minutes. SUPERMAN, after the **Siegel** and **Shuster** days, ceased to be an adventure comic and became domestic comedy. "Oh, Jimmy Olsen's doing something silly again. Oh, Lois is trying to find out my identity. Oh, Lucy burned the roast, and I gotta be at the club in half an hour." The thing that appealed to me about Marvel was, first, its sense of dynamism. I picked up a TALES OF SUSPENSE with a ten-page CAPTAIN AMERICA story drawn by **Jack Kirby**, and there was more excitement in that one story, which just had him battling a bunch of thugs, than in practically all the DC comics I'd read up to that point. Not to say I didn't enjoy them, there was just more to it. The Fantastic Four, instead of being the largest people in their cosmos *a la* Superman, were the smallest very often. They were continually running into things where they could just throw back their heads and look up. That excited me a whole lot

Jack Kirby's real magnum opus? Art by Walt Simonson.

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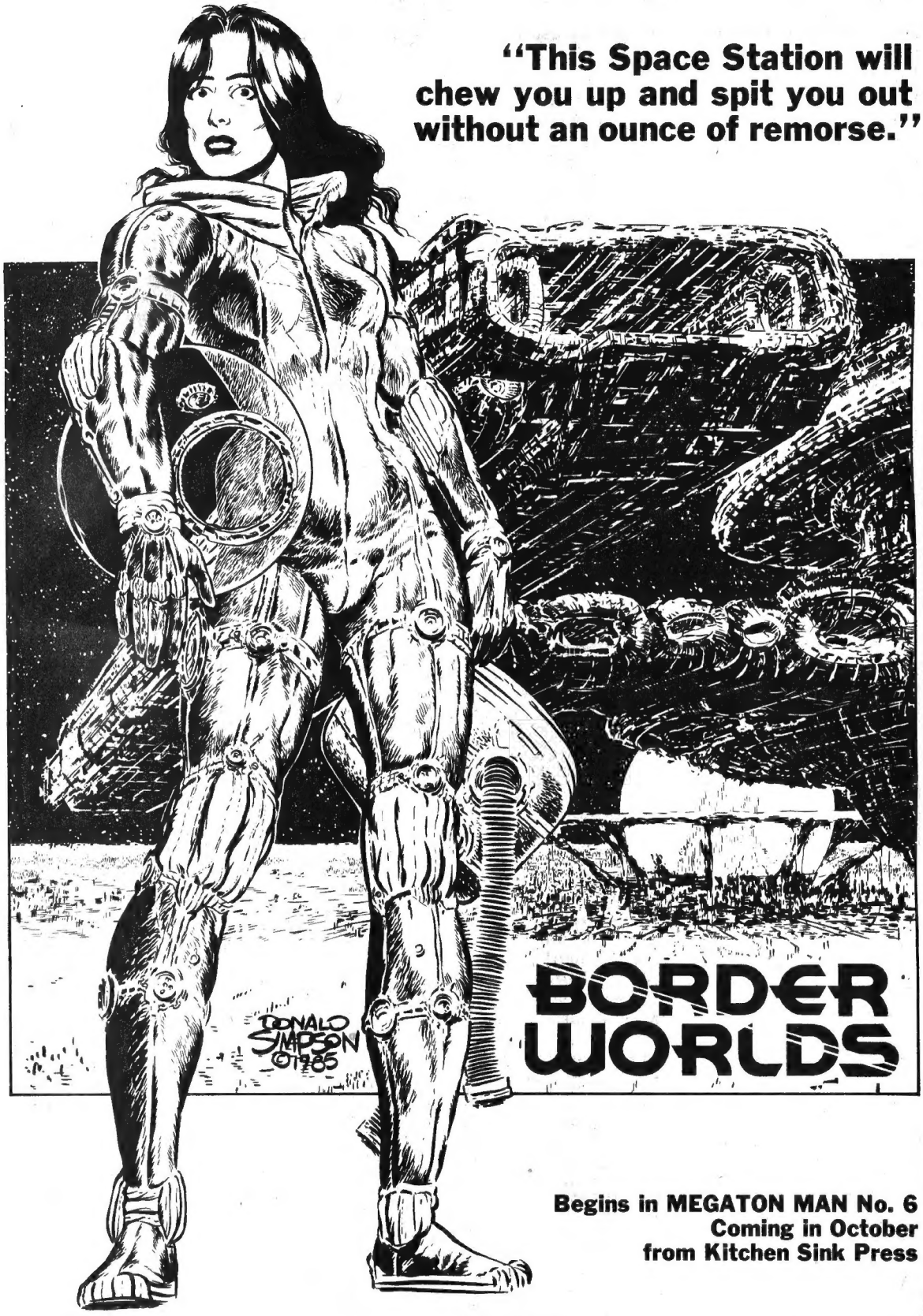

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"DC heroes represent values which are good."

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more. To an extent, that kept me reading comics probably long past the age where most people quit.

PETER S.: *But couldn't you say the opposite about SPIDER-MAN, that it has a more human scale rather than a cosmic one?*

PETER G.: A similar process applies, because he is not the largest person in his world the way Batman is in his. Batman, especially, was in control: he was the top, the Coliseum, the Louvre Museum. Spider-Man, in the same way that the F.F. were dwarfed by Galactus, was dwarfed by his society, as we all are. What **Stan Lee** really did was give the universe back to comics.

My two favorite SF books at DC were GREEN LANTERN and ADAM STRANGE. Because Adam Strange was just a guy, a lot of the appeal of those stories was the planet Rann. He was cast ashore by the zeta beam on this strange planet, where he became a hero. GREEN LANTERN was the only comic DC was doing that had a universe-wide scale, with the Guardians of the Universe. Not that much was done with GREEN LANTERN because he ended up fighting people like Sonar, the guy dressed like a band leader with the tuning-fork gun.

Character is really the way a person reacts to the society around him. I think it's **Aristotle** who defines character in drama as the way a person reacts to a situation other than the one he finds himself in. A character who just advances the plot is totally characterless. Green Lantern's role as a player in the drama is that he is without fear, he's cautious around yellow, he's devoted to the Guardians, and he's also devoted to his home planet. That does not make a character. What you want to know is where did he grow up, what kind of women does he like, where did he go to school, what kind of music does he like, what kind of food does he like? You never found out any of that because he had no society. Most of the Marvel characters did. That's a secondary appeal to the sense of scope. I discovered that later, and I codified it just about five minutes ago. It once again expanded comics.

Don McGregor once said that all **Stan Lee** did was to return DICK TRACY and LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE to comic books and, in a way, he's right. He also introduced the real **Stan Lee** into comics, which is important. **Stan Lee** returned a lot of the ambiance of the adventure strip and the romance strip back into mainstream comics, where it had languished, at least as far as super-hero comics were concerned. And the Marvel Universe was fun to walk around in. I was never that much of a hero worshipper, but I'm fascinated by worlds. I love walking around in them. I love them as new places to be.

Detectives with an inter-dimensional difference, Peter Gillis' new series for First Comics' FIRST ADVENTURES, "Blaze Barlow and the Eternity Command."

PETER S.: *A sense of wonder.*

PETER G.: A sense of exploration and discovery.

PETER S.: *And that's what you're trying to do with the Nightmare Realm and the Land of Miracle in THE BLACK FLAME and with the different planets in THE MICRONAUTS, as well as what you'll be doing in THE ETERNALS?*

PETER G.: Yep. The penetration of mysteries. **Jack Kirby** was continually expanding your horizons, even with THE ETERNALS, where the theme of the book wasn't the inner conflict of the characters, but the characters coming to grips with a universe that has suddenly opened up. The gods come down to Earth and, all of a sudden, everything's changed. Earth gets redefined. Everything gets called into question. It's a new ball game, folks. That's the sort of thing that still gives me the chills when I read some of **Kirby**'s best stuff. Those sort of new opportunities for exploration. I like reading it; I like writing it.

PETER S.: *You worked in the theater when you were in school, writing musicals. How does your theatrical background and your*

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"I was scared by the Kirby monster books."

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Captain America, MArvel Comics' ultimate father figure, and his sidekick, Bucky, in action in CAPTAIN AMERICA #109 by Stan Lee, Jack Kirby and Syd Shores.

academic background affect you as a comics writer?

PETER G.: Academia and drama gave me more of a sense of structure and of theme. Stories that Stan could do, or that **Frank Miller** can do — there's something underneath them, something more fundamental than somone punching someone else in almost any conflict, something about who these people are. If it's just people beating each other up, big deal. But if it's Captain America beating up the Red Skull, the whole thing can be loaded with symbolic conflict. It also allowed me to look at these characters and see all of the things that make them up. Captain America cannot just he described in terms of his costume, his powers, and his origin. He also has to be described in terms of what he means. Captain America's a father figure. That's something I realized after writing him. I'd written five or six CAPTAIN AMERICA stories, and a preponderance of them included children, and I was wondering why I had drifted towards that, and I realized Captain America was the ultimate father figure in Marvel Comics. He's not just an authority figure like Reed Richards; he's also a nurturing figure. He's Uncle Sam. He's America. The responsibility that he feels is the responsibility of the father. I could penetrate that thanks to having been taught how to pull apart a text and put it back together in college. I found I could use all of the echoes in a character — well or badly, it's up to the readers to decide. It very often makes a better story than if the writer wasn't able to point to the characters and say, "This is there." Certain people with an instinctual knowledge of these characters can do it anyway, without intellectualizing about it first. I find intellectualizing about it first doesn't take away spontaneity and can make for really good stories, as long as you remember, once you have the insight, to bury it, and not write it out in a caption for all the world to see, but to make it implicit in a story and to make the story flow.

PETER S.: *A good number of people who were comics fans in the 1960s became comics professionals in the 1970s and 1980s, like yourself...*

PETER G.: And like you.

PETER S.: *And like me. What do you think influenced fans from our generation to work in comics?*

PETER G.: I think the main reason a lot of people of my generation stuck with comics is like a lot of things in the '60s, like rock music — various things looked as though they were just continuing to grow and evolve and develop. In comics, **Jack Kirby** just bloomed in the early '60s, just kept doing brilliant stuff. Along came **Jim Steranko, Neal Adams, Bernie Wrightson,** a whole bunch of new artists, continuing to build on previous things. In terms of the writing, you had **Stan Lee**, who was the **Homer** of our comic book culture, and **Roy Thomas**, who became our **Virgil**, and a whole bunch of epigones, like **Don McGregor, Doug Moench, Chris Claremont, Steve Englehart**, and **Steve Gerber**. They all loved the best in Marvel — and DC — comics. There seemed to be this real strong evolution towards new themes, more adult material. And by adult material, I don't mean just T & A and graphic violence; I mean political commitment, sexual subtlety...

PETER S.: *Characterizational depth...*

PETER G.: Characterizational nuance, as well. As well as the impulse to take **Jack Kirby's** universe and stretch it out a couple of light years further. Those were the writers who excited me, who kept me interested in comics. They were trying to push it a little further, trying to say, "Okay, how do I reinterpret it for myself? How do I take all the stuff I loved as a kid and also make it work for me as an adult?" That almost never meant violating the old stuff, because of their love of the old stuff, but instead working towards fleshing it out. That's the way I see comics

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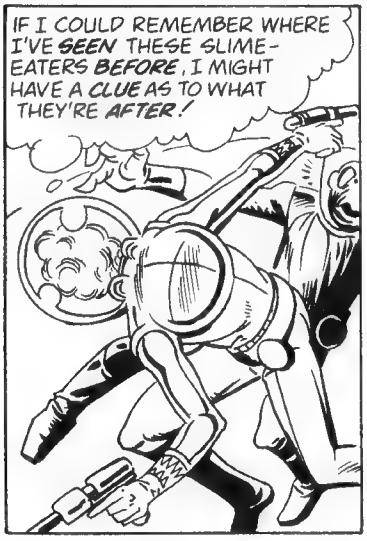

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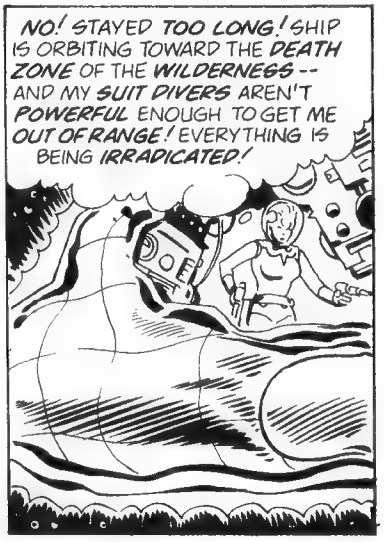
NO! STAYED TOO LONG! SHIP IS ORBITING TOWARD THE DEATH ZONE OF THE WILDERNESS--AND MY SUIT DIVERS AREN'T POWERFUL ENOUGH TO GET ME OUT OF RANGE! EVERYTHING IS BEING IRRADICATED!

"Publishers and fans are closer now."

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NOW IT IS YOU WHO FLATTER ME. C'MERE.
AND NOW, I KNOW ABOUT THIS PARTY JUST STARTING IN PARIS. LET'S GO DANCING.
BUT--!
I WON'T TAKE NO FOR AN ANSWER, SAMUEL!
VERY WELL, THEN. PARIS!
YOU KNOW WHAT ENDEARS YOU TO ME? EVEN THOUGH YOU'RE HUMAN, YOU'RE JUST AS SOLEMN AS MOST ETERNALS--BUT IT'S FAR, FAR EASIER TO GET YOU TO CHANGE YOUR MIND!

Taking Jack Kirby's universe a little bit further. Peter Gillis and Sal Buscema on THE ETERNALS.

the way they were done by the best people in the 1970s, enabling them to remain satisfactory for people whose horizons were continuing to expand.

PETER S.: *Do you see differences in the attitudes of comics writers and the comics audience today from what they were back then?*

PETER G.: Perhaps the most significant change in terms of the audience and the way the industry and the artform work is the rise of the direct sales shops. It's very much like the change science fiction went through in the '50s when it changed from the pulp magazine to the SF paperback. That's the way comics are going. SF became less of a mass market thing and more of a cult thing. That's happening to comics. That has the risk of turning the comics audience more into an isolated group of fanatics, as opposed to a widespread group of fanatics.

What **George Lucas** and **Steven Spielberg** realized when most of Hollywood didn't is that the baby boom generation's culture is very much SF, fantasy, and pulp adventure-oriented. What's happened in the '80s is you get people like Aardvark-Vanaheim, Renegade Press and Eclipse who appeal to a cult market, who can get to them, and stay alive. It's allowed for a real wide variety of books. The publishers and the fans have drawn closer together.

PETER S.: *Do you think that the comics being done now will inspire people the way that comics in the '60s and early '70s inspired people in our generation?*

PETER G.: I still see a lot of the people who were working in the '70s as pursuing their personal visions. Certainly **Steve Englehart** is doing it. **Don McGregor** is doing it. **Doug Moench** is doing it. These days I don't see a lot of people trying to stretch boundaries. To a certain extent, that's because a lot of boundaries have been stretched, in the same way there's a new traditionalism in almost everything from painting to quote — serious music — unquote, to literature. The **Reagan** era. Post-modernism. A lot of people use comics when they're writing or drawing them as an escape from change, or as an escape from growth, rather than as an impetus for growth. **Frank Miller** and **Bill Sienkiewicz** certainly are looking to comics not only to do what they like but to have the work in turn push them. **Chris Claremont** in THE X-MEN continues to both affect and be affected by the characters he's writing. He's not just trying to write a good rock-'em-sock-'em. The idea of comics as *comfortable* stuff disturbs me, and I think a lot of people view them that way. One of the most disturbing reactions in terms of the fan populace is, they know what they want, and they expect to get it, and if they don't get it, they're real pissed. "What happened? Wolverine didn't carve anybody up this issue! What is this?" And a lot of people just want to see some blood, or some sex, or some spaceships with a lot of little noodles on them. Or they want to see somebody die. Or they want to see a nice, light, humorous comic book, and what are you trying to do — put political relevance into it? A lot of fandom says, "This is what comics *should* be, and if you give us something else, we're not going to take it."

PETER S.: *But is there still a section of fandom that wants to see thematic depth, characterizational subtlety, and artistic experimentation?*

PETER G.: Sure. And if those people also want to see people's heads blown off, I'm not going to complain too much.

PETER S.: *What do you think of the grow-*

Exploring the nature of individuality with the mysterious Cloud from THE NEW DEFENDERS #149 drawn by Don Perlin and Art Nichols.

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"Killing somebody off is an arbitrary act."

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ing tendency towards sensationalism, to use deaths of major characters and splitting up long time romantic relationships between the characters?

PETER G.: You can think of comics as a chess game, where you can move the characters around, and you can take them off the board or change them. When you kill somebody off, the reaction will tend to be, "What a bizarre move! What an amazing move! I never thought the writer would have done that." It becomes startling, but it's startling like it is in sports. The best comics, even when you use super-heroes, will set up the board, but then change the dimensions of the board, change the size of the squares, and then remove the board altogether. Ultimately, life doesn't have a gameboard. The death of a super-hero too often is just the removal of a chesspiece from the board. It's startling that a person would do it, but it's still according to the rules of the game.

I'll use one of the things I did as an example. It definitely wasn't in **Marc DeMatteis'** mind when he created Cloud that she would turn into a sex-changing super-character. By the way, I'll plug Marc's MOONSHADOW here. I think it's a wonderful book, and it's precisely the thing I'm talking about: a book in which the gameboard rules change from issue to issue. Anyway, Marc's scenario for Cloud was a fairly conventional idea, and I said, "I'm going to pull the board out from under this. I'll make what is not an allowed move in the super-hero game: a hero cannot change sex." Fortunately **Carl Potts** and **Ann Nocenti** let me do it. There was **Englehart's** Mantis marrying a tree, and **Gerber's** having a funny animal duck plop down onto Marvel-Earth. It's not an allowed move, and it expands the gameboard until it becomes a little more like life, or a little more like the whole universe of imagination.

PETER S.: *No one attempts to identify with or become emotionally attached to chesspieces. But it could be said that a writer's job is to interest people in his characters, and to get people to care about them. Therefore, moves on the "gameboard" with the characters shouldn't be made simply for the sake of surprize, to shake the readers up, because that would be just manipulating the readers' feelings for the sake of manipulation. Better writers can continually surprise the reader, but do so in ways that increase the thematic and characterizational strength of the books, rather than being merely sensationalistic. I'd say that what you did with Cloud was surprising, but you used it to explore a particular theme.*

PETER G.: What makes people what they are.

PETER S.: *The nature of individuality. It also made Cloud come alive as a character.*

The New Defenders' line-up during Peter's tenure.

PETER G.: Yep. I'll sort of paradoxically state that a lot of the shocking things that are done in comics are sort of tawdry because they are not tawdry enough. You were able to get away with characters shacking up as long as you didn't actually show it: just have the woman come down in somebody else's shirt and hug the guy and say, "Did you feel bad about what we did? Don't." Those are not outrageous moves; those are not profoud moves; those are fairly trivial soap opera characterizations, even on the level of killing somebody or having him attain godhood. You handle it as a hack and it's as trivial as anything else. They're not shocking; they don't change the view of the universe. Immediately the reader's attention is drawn to The Author's Choice. The reader thinks, "He chose to do that," rather than, "Wow, that's strange that that happened!" Killing somebody off is an extremely arbitrary act, and any writer with sufficient clout at any company can come in and write a story in which a major character dies. People will sit up and take notice because of that very fact. It takes no skill whatsoever; you don't have to know much about characterization. It can be a purely arbitrary element in a story. Sex can be a purely arbitrary element in a story. In most movies it is, and it is in a lot of comics. That can generate sensationalism, and it generates reader response. They *will* be startled by it; they *will* be shocked by it. If that's all you want to do, to shock the readers, if all you want is somebody's attention, then you can get it. But interest is not affection.

I wonder, actually, if there is a connection between this and the fact that we view so many of our celebrities as "Gee, they're really rich and famous," and all that, rather than as they are liked or even loved. Stars for my father's generation tended to be more like **Spencer Tracy** and **Gary Cooper.** There was attempt made in publicizing them — or growing out of themselves — to have them not only noticed, but admired, liked, and loved.

PETER S.: *This also had to do with the kind of roles they played in movies.*

PETER G.: That's very often the way a studio would build up their actors. But these days you'll get a celebrity who will act like a jerk, not have that many sterling qualities about him, and not be admired, but because he happens to get a job in a big TV series, he is a celebrity, and is therefore looked up to because, of course, he's successful and he's got lots of money. It's a world in which attention and name recognition is viewed as a real positive thing, and I think it's perhaps reflected in our comics. Perhaps most of what turns out to be required is keeping our attention, and so periodically some people de-

"Lots of people want some blood and sex."

cide to slap you across the face and wake you up to keep paying attention. Rather than to awaken you in different ways, or to engage your emotions with the writer's express intention of making you cry when you read, or really shudder, or really get angry at what is being shown. I think that's one of the reasons Chris is so successful on THE X-MEN, because he feels for them, he really wants to elicit an emotional reaction from the readers. He wants everyone to like the X-MEN as much as he likes them. **Don McGregor** in SABRE is very much the same way, and so is **Doug Moench** in AZTEC ACE. They all like the characters. Also, **Alan Moore** in his stuff. **Alan Moore** can be manipulative, he can write about really nasty sons of bitches, too. But his characters breathe, and he really wants to grab you and pull you into the story. That sort of commitment shows, and it's what makes those books some of my favorites.

PETER S.: *What do you think about the recent controversy over censorship of comics and placing advisories on them?*

PETER G.: I think the process by which First does it is probably the best thing to do. I don't believe in a rating system, but I do believe in giving out a certain amount of information about the books. I sympathize with the retailers who were startled by the fact that they didn't think this book would have overtly sexual writing or overtly sexual scenes or decapitation or that sort of thing when there really wasn't a good indication in the advertisements for ordering these books that they'd be in them. First sends out a Xerox copy of the book so that the retailers can see what they're ordering and can make their own decisions.

I am vehemently opposed to censorship in any form. Most of the people who are against pornography have a lack of faith in the human mind. I believe that the human mind is an organ for processing information. The human mind is not polluted by filth. You can put garbage into a human mind and get good stuff out as long as you have trained the mind

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ALL YOU HAD TO DO WAS MAKE ME HAPPY. THAT'S ALL. JUST TONIGHT.
BUT THAT WAS ASKING TOO MUCH, WASN'T IT?

© 1985 Steve Gerber and Val Mayerick

Sex and violence in comics Steve Gerber and Val Mayerick style from VOID INDIGO.

"I don't believe in a rating system."

© 1978 Don McGregor and Paul Gulacy

to think for itself. The generalized argument against pornography is, "You show somebody something that is bad, and he will want to do the thing that is bad, even if you show it as bad." To me there's an elementary fallacy there. As **Dick Cavett** once said, "Violence on the screen causes violence on the street? Well, comedy on the screen doesn't cause comedy on the street." People are afraid of images, and images never hurt anybody. Images are easy to attack because images don't fight back. Images are necessary if you're going to know what's wrong and what's right.

With comics it's that same fallacy: you can't portray evil. But then you can't portray good, either. Healing without pain isn't healing. If a person's mind is alive, and he sees something horrible that happens in a book, he'll be able to take his own personal morality, and if it's a bad thing that's happening, he'll see it as bad, and it's another thing to avoid. Simple as that. Basically the censors say, "Portraying a negative impulse forces these people to think, and when people think, they stop doing exactly what *I* want them to do." Comics are even smaller than other entertainment media; we have less money so we can buckle under their pressure a lot easier. That's all the more reason why we shouldn't.

PETER S.: *Do you think comic books should carry advisory warnings?*

PETER G.: I think retailers should be aware of what's in their books.

PETER S.: *Retailers have argued that they don't have time to look at all of them.*

PETER G.: Tell them what's in it beforehand. Let them make their own decision.

My feeling on the Marvel situation is that Marvel was at fault, because they wanted to have it both ways. They wanted a book with full frontal nudity to be put on the racks with the other books. They wanted it to be adult, but at the same time, they wanted to to sell as well as a regular Marvel comic. Both MOONSHADOW and VOID INDIGO had overt sexual content. VOID INDIGO had brutality and sexual violence. Frankly, it was a fairly powerful story, but unbelievably nasty.

PETER S.: *Is the reaction to VOID INDIGO a sign of conservatism on the part of the retailers and readers, sign that they don't want such subjects to be dealt with in comics at all?*

PETER G.: A lot of them cerainly don't, and I view that as a problem. But it was also a surprise. There was no indication that VOID INDIGO would be that violent a book. It should be mentioned. People should have the opportunity to be informed that there is that sort of stuff in the books. From a strictly sales point of view, selling it in the same racks as the undergrounds won't sell enough copies to warrant Marvel's doing it. There should just be an honesty about the books and not trying to represent a VOID INDIGO as just another Marvel comic.

Do readers like Sabre as much as its creator, Don McGregor, does? Art by Paul Gulacy.

I will turn around and say I think the retailers are doing a disservice to the readership by saying, "I'm not going to carry *that* because it's got *that* in it." I think censorship on the part of the retailers, and self-censorship on the part of the readers, are bad things. I think the covering up of sex and death in this country drives people crazy — not that the uncovering of them would drive people sane. But that straitjacketing of the spirit and imaginations something I've never believed in. Somebody who's retailing a product should know the product that he's retailing, and he should have an opportunity to see what it is, and if it's a significant departure — if Marvel Comics starts doing a book with a lot of blood and a lot of sex in it — he should be told. AMERICAN FLAGG certainly doesn't need advisories because everyone knows by now it's going to have a lot of women in garter belts and violence in it. It's not a surprise. And if GRIMJACK suddenly turned into a funny animal book, I think retailers should be apprised of *that*, too. That's simply politeness to the retailers. I think that's what a lot of the irateness from the retailers that I've heard about constitutes — not so much that they objected to the actual content, but that they were led to believe it'd just be another Marvel or DC comic.

PETER S.: *You make a point of talking to a lot of fans at comics conventions, such as the Chicago Minicons. What is your sense of the mood of comics fans today?*

PETER G.: I don't hear too many people saying, "I want something that nobody's publishing at this point," partly because if enough people say they want, say, a mystery book, it exists. About the only thing that doesn't exist is a continuing Western. For some reason that's deep in American culture these days, nobody wants a Western.

PETER S.: *You said once at a convention that you'd like to do a P. G. Wodehouse-style comic.*

PETER G.: It was greeted with confused silence, as I recall. You know, it'd be a madcap comedy book. I really like AMBUSH BUG, but it's not in the NOT BRAND ECCH tradition; it's playing off super-hero cliches. What I'm talking about is a comic

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"Fans are looking for what they like."

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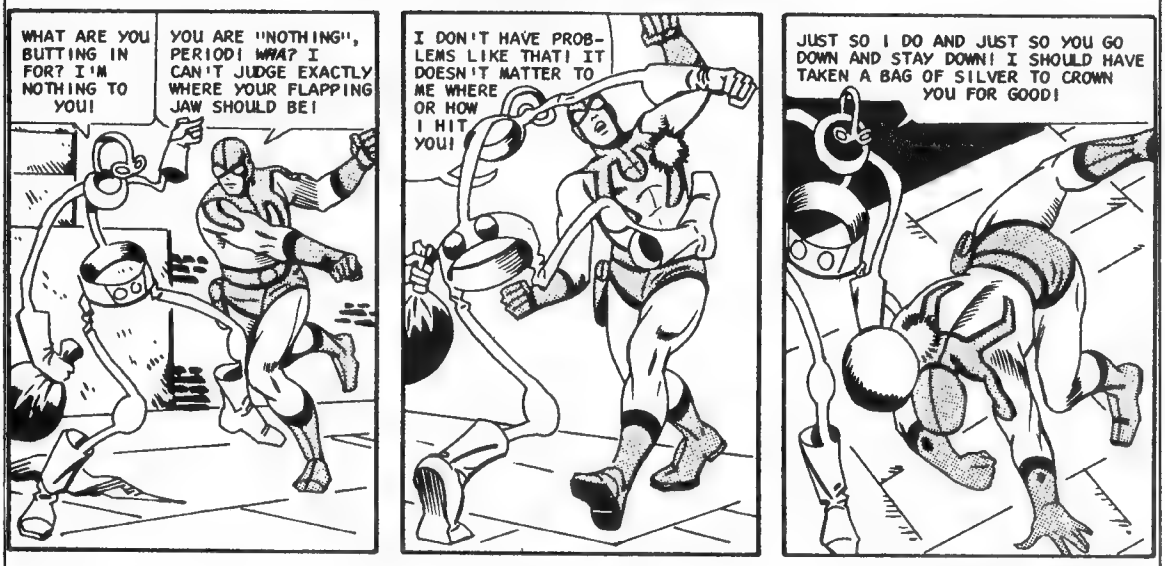
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I DON'T HAVE PROBLEMS LIKE THAT! IT DOESN'T MATTER TO ME WHERE OR HOW I HIT YOU!
JUST SO I DO AND JUST SO YOU GO DOWN AND STAY DOWN! I SHOULD HAVE TAKEN A BAG OF SILVER TO CROWN YOU FOR GOOD!

Why has this great comic-book artist fallen out of fan favor? An example of Steve Ditko's unique story-telling approach from THE BLUE BEETLE.

book equivalent of **Howard Hawks'** BRINGING UP BABY in film, or **Wodehouse's** Jeeves stories. Just comic-book adaptations of funny stories, not involving superheroes. It's not what comics do best, which is action.

PETER S.: *But wait a minute. There's a long tradition of great comic* strips *that do comedy.*

PETER G.: But comic strips, with a few exceptions like **Frank King's** GASOLINE ALLEY Sunday pages and KRAZY KAT, don't take full advantage of the graphic medium, because it's just a little strip with four or five little panels. The thing doesn't vary a whole lot.

PETER S.: *But there are people who did great work with comic strips. How about Milton Caniff? Winsor McCay?*

PETER G.: McCay, yes. **Caniff**, not as much. **Caniff** has phenomenal characterization, phenomenal use of blacks, phenomenal use of locales. But as far as utilizing graphics it's still in this little box. It's still a small screen, and it's still a screen that focuses on things one at a time. It's very linear. One wonders what **Caniff** would have done if he had been working with books and had the opportunity to work with pages at a time, pages full of panels. What if **Milton Caniff** had been **Will Eisner**?

PETER S.: *But let's get back to what the mood of the fans is today.*

PETER G.: Most of their dissatisfaction is that they want the stuff that's already being done, done better. Most of them don't say, "I think there should be more depth to characterization." They say, "I didn't like this. This was dopey. Why don't they cut this guy's brake lines or something? What he's doing with that is terrible."

PETER S.: *They can't quite put their finger on the exact problem, then?*

PETER G.: They quite often can't put their finger on something systematic. They go, "This person can't draw. This person can't write." Or "This person can draw but he isn't drawing. Why is he drawing like that? He was drawing good stuff. What happened?".

PETER S.: *Are they usually right?*

PETER G.: No.

PETER S.: *Do they talk this way, then, both about work you think is bad and work you think is good?*

PETER G.: Yes, sometimes. I've humorously said that the difference between a pro and a fan is **Steve Ditko**. The first lesson in becoming a professonal is to start liking **Steve Ditko's** work.

PETER S.: *That wasn't true in the '60s, when fans liked Ditko's work.*

PETER G.: Right. The fact is the fans today all go, "Oh, **Steve Ditko**, ick!" or these days, even, "Ick, **Jack Kirby**!" whereupon all of us pros sitting behind the table are going, "What are you talking about?"

PETER S.: *Many of these pros having grown up in the '60s reading Ditko's and Kirby's work?*

PETER G.: Right. Some people will say, "**Tom Sutton** is terrible." But I'm working with the man. I really love what he's doing. I think he deserves a lot more attention than he gets these days.

On the positive side, the fans are looking for what they like, and what satisfies them. But there're two dimensions to that. There's what's automatically likable, what's basic and primal, and there's not enough of that anymore. I'll go along with that. And then there's "**Tom Sutton's** too eccentric. He does bizarre page layouts." Or their reaction to **Alex Toth.**

PETER S.: *They like a certain kind of comics, which is exemplified by the top selling books, and many readers' taste doesn't extend into other styles.*

PETER G.: It depends on if they can really get into the spirit of something. They'll say,

One of Peter's likes, AMBUSH BUG

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"Neal Adams is a real caricaturist."

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"There isn't stuff that grabs me anymore the way this did," or, "I was feeling for these characters and then they just did something that ruined it for me." Or they will see the superficialities, and superficialties are fairly important. They go, "**Steve Ditko** draws ugly women." Can't argue with that. But if comics to you are pictures of beautiful women, then, of course, you'll hate **Steve Ditko.** But it's a pretty superficial reason to hate **Steve Ditko.** Ultimately that just comes down to an arbitrary decision. If they talk in terms of the way it is deep down, it's a legitimate criticism. It's sort of like the same way as comics fans, when they try to draw, will learn **Barry Windsor-Smith's** cross-hatching without learning his composition sense, without the basics.

PETER S.: *But are there enough readers who appreciate what you think they should?*

PETER G.: Oh, yeah. There are a lot of intelligent folks out there. But frankly, when a 25-year-old comes up to me and starts giving me superficial criticisms and using them as dogma, that worries me. If a 12-year-old comes up and says, "I don't like the way **Don Perlin** draws the Beast. He's not beasty enough. I don't like THE DEFENDERS for that reason," I consider the source.

But one of the most significant things about FANTASTIC FOUR #25 and #26 for me was that in one of the panels Iron Man's epaulet was missing. I just couldn't stop looking at that panel and I said, "This is wrong! This is terrible!" It stuck out like a sore thumb, and my enjoyment of the story was significantly diminished because they'd made that blunder in one panel. So I understand why all the kids get upset.

PETER S.: *Because they want to believe so much in the "reality" of the story.*

PETER G.: Exactly. I can understand that. But when I go into a comics store and a guy tells me he picked up one of the **Brian Bolland** JUDGE DREDDs and he put it back because it looked too "cartoony," I go, "**Brian Bolland**? Cartoony?" "Yeah, Judge Dredd's jaw's too big!" I get worried then.

PETER S.: *Cartooning involves distortion for effect. You can understand why readers want everything to look as realistic as possible, but that limits what cartooning can do, and comics* are *cartoons.*

PETER G.: But it's exaggeration in one sense as opposed to another. **Sal Buscema** is as "cartoony" an artist as anybody, because he systematizes and reduces the human face to certain elements. **Neal Adams** is a real caricaturist. None of his characters are in realistic proportions. It's all exaggeration.

PETER S.: *But it's a matter of what most readers will accept as realistic looking, which seems to me to vary from generation to generation of readers.*

Above and below: Is Judge Dredd's jaw too big?

PETER G.: Right. **Jack Kirby** in the '60s could do no wrong, and "real" was what Jack drew.

PETER S.: *And the readers accepted that. Then in the late '60s, Adams' work became the standard for "realism."*

PETER G.: And to a certain extent, it's **John Byrne** and **George Perez** these days.

PETER S.: *And Byrne was accused of being too "cartoony" when his work first appeared, but people have gotten used to it.*

PETER G.: Right. The same way with **George Perez. Simonson, Chaykin, Miller** — all these people cartoon. **Bill Sienkiewicz,** too —

PETER S.: *People* are *noticing the "cartoon" element in* his *work.*

PETER G.: Most of the people who were and are really good who drew adventure comics *cartooned.* They exaggerated; they simplified. It had to be combined with a certain completeness and subtlety. And it worked. People have to accept certain things. A lot of people won't accept **Kirby's** cartooniness now, or **Ditko's.**

On the writing end, the way Stan wrote was a sort of verbal cartooning, and there was a nice epic feel to it. But these days a lot of the quintessential **Stan Lee** lines come off as hokum. On the other hand, there's a lot of "How can I stand the pain, the torment, the anguish," that won't come off. "All right, mister, you've given it your best shot. Now it's *my* turn." They eat that one up.

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"It's a fifty-fifty collaboration."

KEVIN EASTMAN

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Kevin Eastman
Occupation: Freelance Artist
Born: 30 May 1962 — Portland, ME
Residence: Sharon, CT
Credits: Clay Geerdes' COMICSWAVE; Brad Foster's GOODIES MAGAZINE (Irving, TX); and TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES
Favorite Amphibian: An aardvark — uh, no, a turtle
Biggest Turn-On: Getting a complete set of Star Wars figurines
Biggest Turn-Off: Going to sleep before THE DAVID LETTERMAN SHOW
Favorite Dead President: John Belushi
Favorite Vegetable: Broccoli
Favorite Japanese Monster: Gamera, the Turtle Monster

I recall seeing an ad for the first issue of TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES. The art and lettering were a perfect parody of RONIN, while the concept managed to satirize all the current trends in comics. However, I figured it was such a clever idea that it couldn't possibly sustain a whole book. Worst of all, I didn't snap it up when it appeared in the local comics shops. My mistake. In less than a year, the first printing of #1 has increased in value over 3,000%! Now in its fourth issue, the book continues to be a hot topic of conversation (and controversy) among fans, dealers, and speculators across the country. As the creators rested from a hectic day of being convention guests in Atlanta, we talked about their phenomenal success.

LAMAR WALDRON: *You're both basically artists, right?*
KEVIN EASTMAN: Uh huh.
LAMAR: *Okay, so who does the writing?*
PETER LAIRD: We both do.
KEVIN: It's a split. A lot of people, that's the first thing they say when they come up, "All right, you draw, right? And you write?" But we share the chores, almost fifty-fifty right down the line. We talk out the plot together, we sit down and talk about the idea, what we want to do with the book. Then I'll do some small rough roughs, page layouts, and Peter and I will go over them together. Peter will pick out the ones that I gross him out with. He'll say, "No, this is terrible," or, "This is good, keep this."

LAMAR: *He picks out the ones you gross him out with — or he rejects those?*

KEVIN: Oh, sometimes he picks the...
PETER: I mention them, and then we talk about them.

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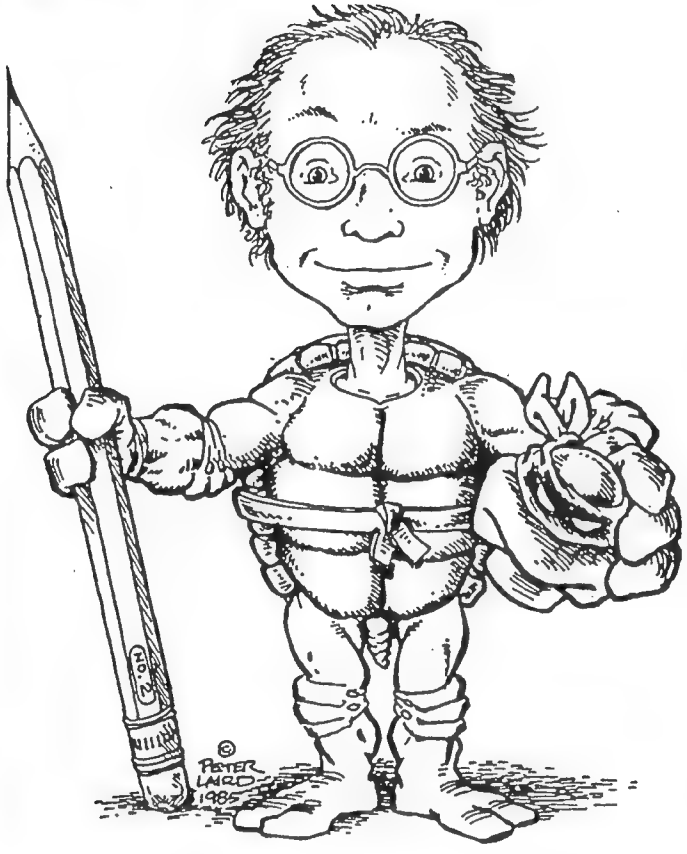
"The Turtles have come alive in '85!"

PETER LAIRD



VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Peter Laird
Occupation: Freelance Artist
Born: 27 January 1954 — North Adams, MA
Residence: Sharon, CT

Credits: Editorial cartoons and illustrations for various newspapers and magazines, and TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

Favorite Amphibian: Salamander

Biggest Turn-On: Collecting Triceratops models

Biggest Turn-Off: Insomnia
Favorite Dead President: Salvador Allende

Favorite Vegetable: Broccoli
Favorite Japanese Monster: Mechagodzilla

© 1985 Peter Laird

KEVIN: Basically, we're very civilized.
LAMAR: *Peter, do you just give Kevin feedback on his layouts, or do you do layouts, too?*

PETER: Essentially, it's worked out so that Kevin does the layouts for the book. Well, I did the first seventeen pages of the second book — but Kevin has done the layouts for everything else, including RAPHAEL, the one-shot micro-series.

KEVIN: Once we've agreed on everything, we both share the chores of actually enlarging the pages to their full size.

LAMAR: *Do you use an opaque projec for that?*

KEVIN: No, it's all freehand. We redraw all the pages totally and we both share in the pencilling activities. Then I do the lettering, although I'm afraid to admit it — I think my lettering's terrible. Then Peter does all the finished scripting. He fine-tunes all the writing.

LAMAR: *So, there's no typed script, or anything like that? You basically work from the layouts?*

KEVIN: Yeah. Peter finishes the writing. As for the inking, we do exactly fifty-fifty of that. If I start drawing a page, I'm only allowed to draw half of that, then Peter finishes the other half.

PETER: Just so we have an even mixture of both of us.

LAMAR: *Are you serious?*
KEVIN: Totally.
LAMAR: *I mean, — so every page...*

PETER: Oh, no, it's not *that* set in concrete. There are certain pages that Kevin's inked totally and there are certain pages that I've inked totally.

Peter: "I tried to emulate Jack Kirby."

LAMAR: *But would it be safe to say that on every page in every book, each of you has made some contribution?*
PETER: With one or two exceptions, yes. In most cases, it's fifty-fifty.
KEVIN: It really is. We like to have a little bit of each of us on the page.
LAMAR: *Did you have any precedent for this kind of partnership? Did this just evolve, or did you model this after some collaborative team that you were aware of, such as Frank Frazetta and Al Willimanson, or Stan Lee and Jack Kirby?*
KEVIN: I think it evolved.
PETER: Yeah. Basically, we just started working together and knew we wanted to collaborate — it just seemed like this was the way to go. We're each writers and artists, and we didn't want any separation of effort.
LAMAR: *What happens when one wants to do something that the other doesn't like? How do you resolve disputes?*
PETER: We argue about it — well, generaly we discuss it first and then, if it gets to the point of arguing about it, we'll argue.
KEVIN: It comes down to a compromise. I'll give a little, then he'll give a little. We work out something we both think is fair.

The Turtles' mentor, Splinter.

PETER: Here's an example. On page nine in the first book, there's a full-page city scene that Kevin drew. When we first did the book in pencil form and I saw it, I said, "Well, it's a nice drawing, but I don't think it fits. I think it slows down the action and I'd rather not have it in there."
KEVIN: Of course, I felt it was essential for the storytelling because in the first part of the book they meet the Purple Dragons—
PETER: — and there's a *long* fight scene and this is afterwards —
KEVIN: — and I felt that this was necessary to break it up, to give the reader breathing space.
LAMAR: *So you won. Why is that, because you're taller?*
KEVIN: No, I had a lot of *bigger* friends who could rough him up and make threatening phone calls. *(Laughter.)*
PETER: No. Essentially, Kevin was adamant. Eventually, I agreed — I wouldn't say under *duress*, but a little reluctantly. But after it was all done, I said, "Hey that's great." I love it now.
KEVIN: It was one of those things, you know, when you feel so strongly about it. It was an odd thing — I just felt that I *had* to have that page in there. That's the only one we've had any real argument over.
LAMAR: *I think it's really interesting the way you guys work together. How did you come to meet each other? Is there any truth to the rumor that you were both raised by Gypsies and were separated at birth?*
PETER: None whatsoever.
KEVIN: Peter was, but Mom never missed him. *(Laughter.)* She was glad we got rid of him, he ate too much cheese —
LAMAR: *How long have you know each other?*
PETER: Three years . . . ?
KEVIN: Yeah, it's been about three years since we met. Peter lived in Northampton, Massachusetts. He was working as a freelance artist there, and I was living in Amherst with my girlfriend, who was going to school there at the time.
LAMAR: *You* are *from Massachusetts originally, then?*
KEVIN: No, I'm originally from Maine.
LAMAR: *Oh,* Maine — *I though that was a Massachusetts accent.*
KEVIN: Maine, too. After Massachusetts, it all gets the same. It only gets worse — more French, the closer you get to the Canadian border.
LAMAR: *So you met three years ago . . .*
KEVIN: It's kind of a cute story, the way we met. I was working at a supermarket bagging groceries at the time. One night, I was riding home from work on the bus, bored to tears, and I saw this little magazine on the floor. It was called SCAT— it was some

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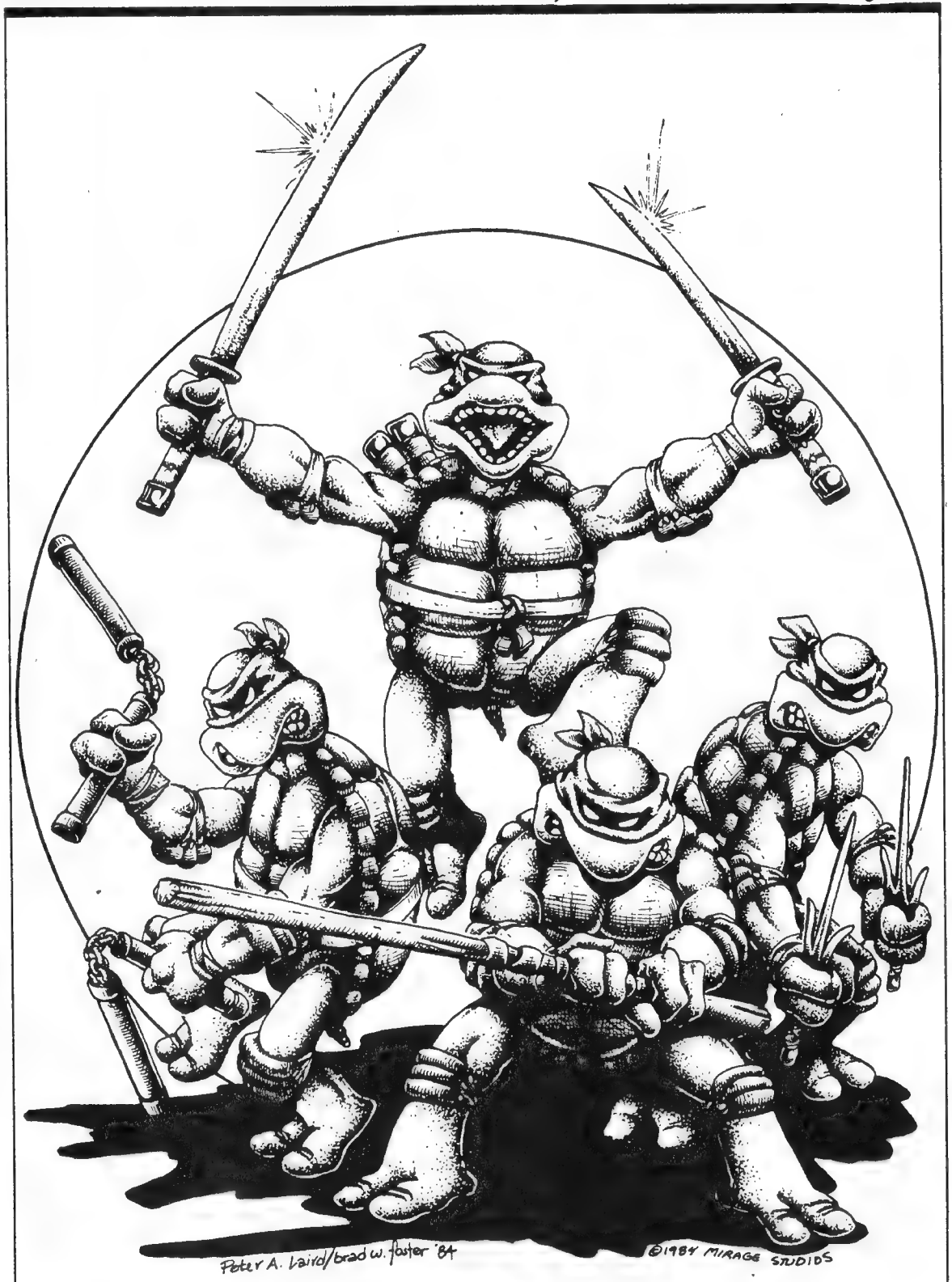
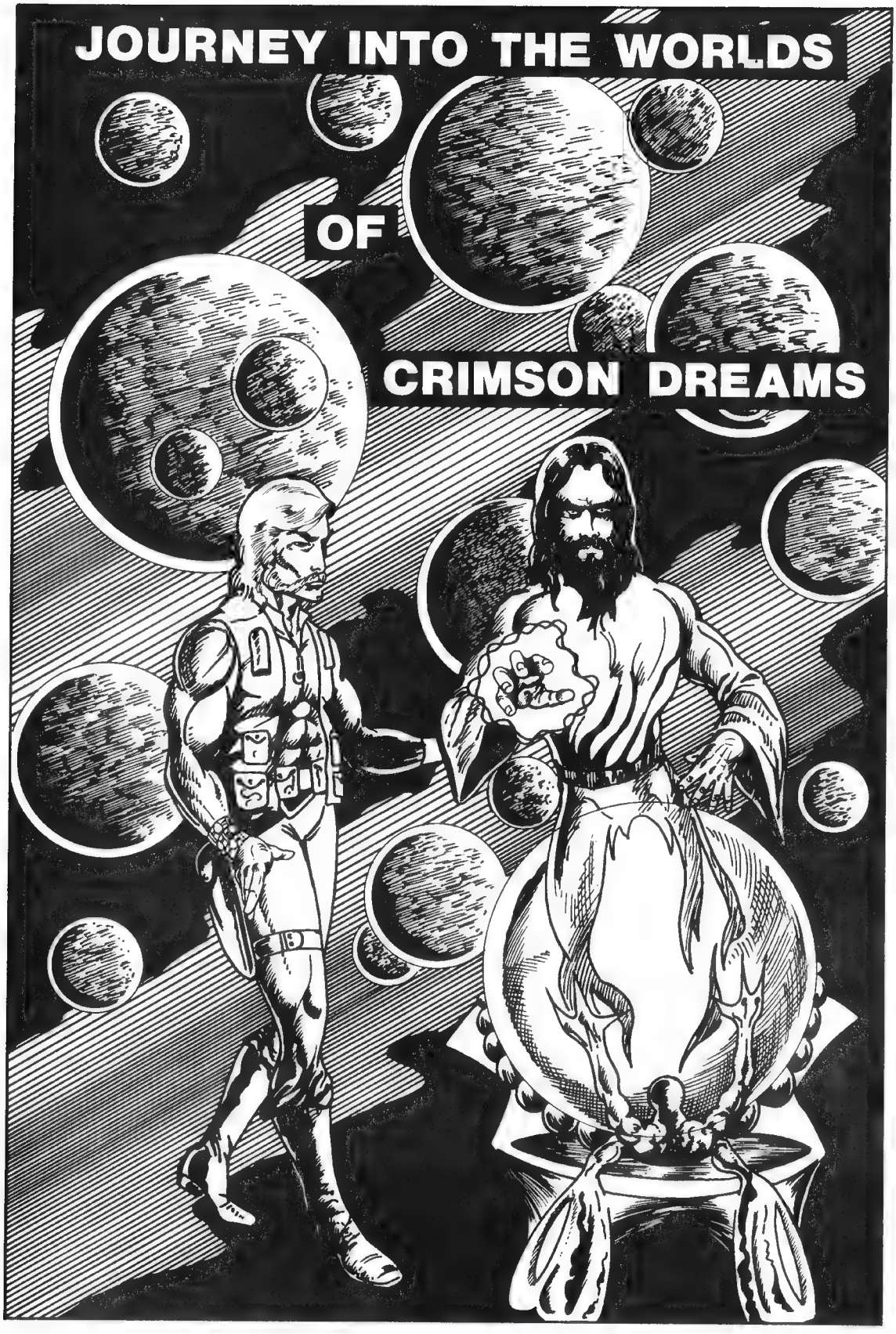
Kevin: "I studied Corben, Bode & Kirby."




JOURNEY INTO THE WORLDS
OF
CRIMSON DREAMS

"We sold out of TURTLES #1 in a month."

comics magazine. So, I picked it up and started thumbing through it. One of the more outstanding artisans in it was **Peter Laird.** I was so excited to find out that this book was printed in Northampton, which was the next town over. So I went over the offices there and brought my stuff — I hadn't published yet or anything — trying to get to do some work for them, and they said, "Geez, you draw a lot like this guy **Peter Laird.**" So they gave me his address and I wrote him a letter. He called me up a couple of days later. I went over and walked into this third-floor studio that he had. The first thing I saw was this original **Jack Kirby** art page and we hit it off from then on. We've been the best of friends since.

LAMAR: *Going back farther than that — how did you guys come to be interested in comics in the first place?*

PETER: I'll take that. Well, I've always enjoyed reading. I'm a fairly voracious reader and I've always enjoyed artwork, and the combination of the two in comics has always been really appealing to me. So I've just read them, since I was a kid — especially since high school. Oh, yeah — **Jack Kirby** was a seminal influence on my drawing.

LAMAR: *What were your favorite comics when you were a kid?*

PETER: You know, I can't remember when I was a really *young* child, but when I was in high school it was the **Kirby** FANTASTIC FOURs, then when he switched over to DC, doing the NEW GODS, MR. MIRACLE, THE FOREVER PEOPLE, KAMANDI, THE DEMON, those things.

LAMAR: *Kirby sounds like one of your big idols.*

PETER: Yeah. And around the same time I also became aware of **Barry Smith** and his cutting loose with CONAN. That was something really different. I enjoyed that a lot.

LAMAR: *And Kevin — how about you, for comics?*

KEVIN: Comics when I was young? Besides the **Kirby** books — KAMANDI being my utmost favorite **Kirby** book at that time — I used to read a lot of the war comics —

LAMAR: *Kubert?*

KEVIN: Yeah, **Kubert**, very much so. I really enjoyed his stuff. It was more like the war comics than the superhero stuff at first.

LAMAR: *You say you pretty much liked the Kirby, Smith, Kubert stuff — did these people have any influence on the work you're doing right now? And if not, what* are *some of the influences, whether artists, writers, film makers, on what you're trying to do on the TURTLES?*

(Dead silence.)

PETER: Dead silence.

KEVIN: Dramatic pause.

PETER: I can't say that there's any really *direct* influence — I'm trying to think —

LAMAR: *Well, did you ever go through the phase that Barry Smith did with Kirby when he did his Kirby imitation until he developed his own style?*

A deadly metal Mouser from TMNT #2.

A sparring match gets out of hand in the RAPHAEL MICRO SERIES.

PETER: Sort of, yeah. I was never as good a **Kirby** imitator as **Smith** was. I tried to take some of the essence of what **Kirby** was — I don't know how successful I was, but... I can't really say I imitated him. I tried to emulate him, maybe, but not imitate him so much.

LAMAR: *Is there anyone else that has an influence on the work that you try to do, the way you tell a story?*

PETER: It's really diverse and diffused, the influences that I've had. I can't really specify one in particular.

LAMAR: *How about you, Kevin?*

KEVIN: Me, personally? As far as influences, I've been very influenced by **Rich Corben, Vaughn Bode,** and **Kirby.** I was influenced by them in the way that they just had such a great, great way to tell a graphic story. They really strived so hard for the different angles, they tried to so hard to make the story really interesting. That's inspired me a lot to really try hard to do something different, just to try different things, to be really experimental — because, you know, the comics world has such a wide range of things that are being done that it's fun to find a slot somewhere and really go crazy.

LAMAR: *So you just want to be as loose as possible and try as many different —*

KEVIN: Yeah, be really experimental. To have someone look at one of our books and

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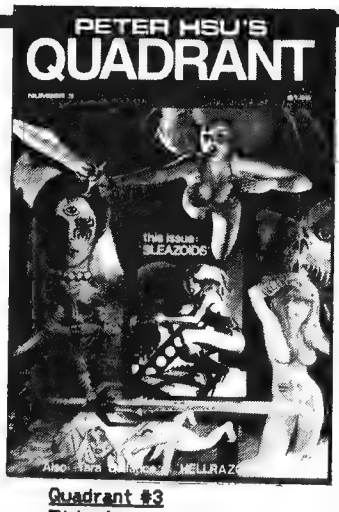

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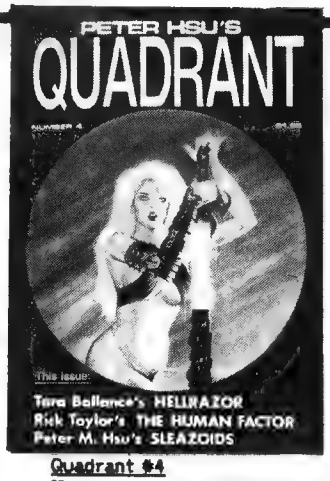

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"The title brings people to the book."

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say, "Gee, I haven't seen that done in a while," "I've never seen that done," or, "It's something really different." We really try hard to have a different product.

LAMAR: *Did either of you guys go to art school, or have any kind of artistic training?*

PETER: I went to the University of Massachusetts in Amherst.

LAMAR: *Did you get a B.F.A?*

PETER: Yeah, a Bachelor of Fine Arts in printmaking.

LAMAR: *Did you find it helpful at all in what you're doing now?*

PETER: Only in that I had to draw a lot more. Life drawing, stuff like that. I learned some techniques that have been helpful, but I should have gone to a more focused school for commercial art or design, because it was all fine art — and, while fine art is fine, it wasn't really what I was interested in.

LAMAR: *It gave you names for the characters in your comics.*

PETER: This is true. **Janson**'s ART HISTORY.

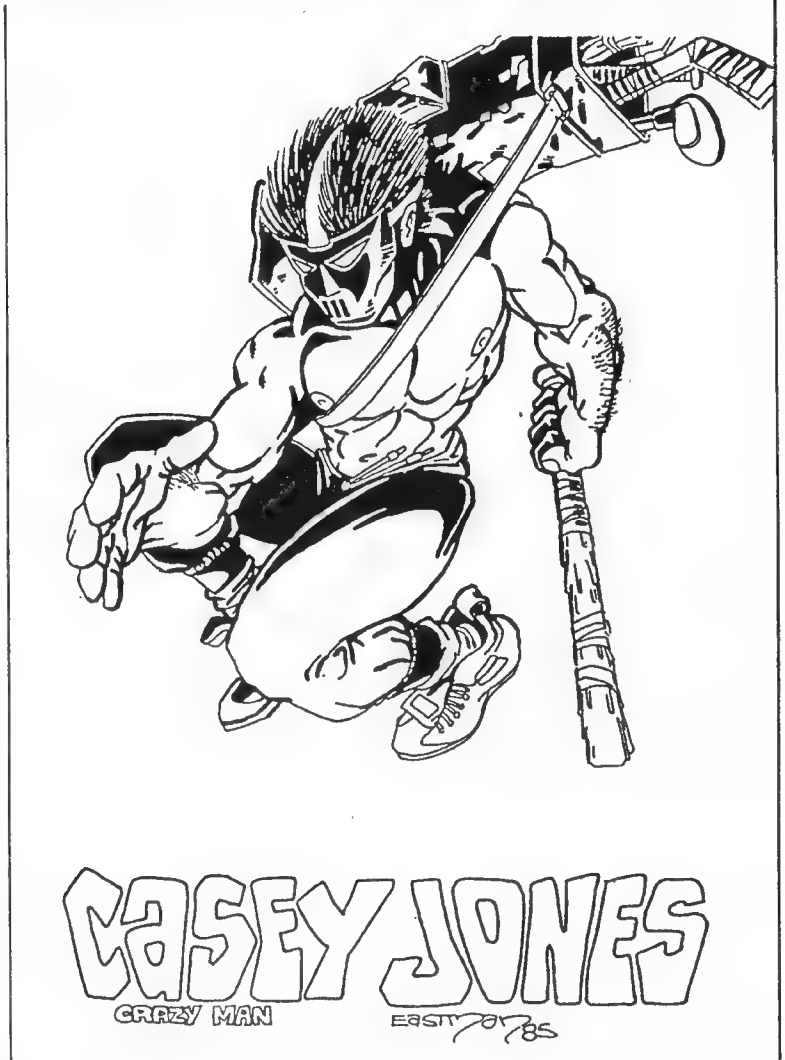
KEVIN: In junior high, early high school, my father used to draw a lot. We signed up together to take some life drawing classes, drawing models and stuff. I did go to art school for a whole semester at the Portland School of Art when I got out of high school. The Portland School of Art is a wonderful school and I really enjoyed it, but it wasn't a state-funded school and it was really expensive. I was living on my own at the time and I just couldn't afford it. So, basically, I just kept at it on the side. I still take life drawing classes when I can. I'm always learning all the time, but I've still got a long way to go.

LAMAR: *Who came up with the idea for the TURTLES? Who's guilty?*

KEVIN: Once again, it was like we do our plots, like we do everything — it couldn't have come about if we didn't feed off each other. It started one night when we were fooling around, working on a book called FUGITOID together —

LAMAR: *FUGITOID?*

KEVIN: Yeah. It's about a robot. It's going to be published later this year. But it was late, we were tired, and just kind of joking around, and I had this idea for this turtle character with this huge mask on and nunchucks strapped to his arms. It was just kind of bizarre. We giggled about it. Peter did his version of it and it went on and on. We got carried away and said, "Geez, why just one? Why don't we do a group of four?" And so I did a sketch of the four Turtles together and I said, "Hey, this is great! We'll call them Ninja Turtles!" — just joking — and Peter said, "No, why don't we call them Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles?" So it was really inspired by both of us.



LAMAR: *Latter day Seigel and Shuster, eh?*

PETER: Yeah. I hope we don't end up like those two guys.

LAMAR: *Which brings us to the next point. How did you go about getting it from an idea stage to a published comic?*

PETER: Well, we did send out our FUGITOID story. We had done five-page segments which we were trying to sell as a backup story.

KEVIN: Yeah, we were just dying to get published, anything we could. We just wanted to draw comics so badly.

LAMAR: *So you sent it to Marvel and DC?*

PETER: No. All the alternatives. Pacific was still functioning at the time.

LAMAR: *And nobody picked it up?*

PETER: No. We got some nice rejection letters, but we were still burning with the desire to do a book, to get it published. We had this idea we were tossing around. We had worked out a whole story to explain how they are teenage mutants and ninjas and turtles, so we did it.

LAMAR: *You mean you did the whole book without a publisher first?*

PETER: Right. We decided by hook or by crook that we would see it in print. We had lots of discussions about how many we should print, because obviously it was going to be a self-published venture. We decided to borrow the money from Kevin's **Uncle Quentin** —

KEVIN: And use all my income tax money.

PETER: His income tax money, and a little money that we had left over in the bank.

LAMAR: *Had either of you ever published anything before?*

PETER: I had self-published a few things. I did a calendar of the gods with my brother,

"Sim parodied Smith and CONAN like we

Eastman and Laird apres Frank Miller. Based on the cover for DAREDEVIL #189.

which had a mythological deity for each month of the year. And I did a comic — a really crude one — a couple of years earlier.

LAMAR: *So you had done a little self-publishing . . .*

PETER: Yeah. We just had to get this book out. The other thing was that there was this local convention we had gone to, and there was going to be another one in four months, and we knew that we had to get something out to sell there, to premier, and whatnot. So we did. We went ahead and found a local printer in Dover, New Hampsire, where we were living at the time, and he printed three thousand of them for us. Then, with some trepidation, we tried to sell them.

LAMAR: *What was the response initially, before it became a hot seller? Did you contact distributors like Bud Plant and Glenwood?*

KEVIN: Did we? No, I —

PETER: Yeah, we did actually, even before the book ws printed. *(To Kevin:)* Remember, we did those press releases — the four-page ones with sample artwork? We sold about half the print run before the book actually came back from the printer to distributors — Bud Plant, and I think Glenwood picked up about a third of them, something like that, and then Capital bought some. When we got the books back from the printer, they were all sold.

LAMAR: *The whole run?*

PETER: Yeah, the whole run of three thousand. In fact, we sold all of them within a month. They were all out of the house. Then we had to do a second printing of six thousand.

LAMAR: *Did the response surprise you?*

KEVIN: Very, very much. We argued for the whole time we were drawing the book about just how many we should print. Peter's like, "Let's do five thousand!" and I'm like, "This is *my* money and I borrowed money from my family to do it. Let's do a thousand and *hope*." I figured that if we could sell five hundred books and make our money back, and just keep the rest to give to friends or whatever, then we were doing good.

LAMAR: *Were you guys smart enough to keep back copies of the first printing of #1?*

PETER: I wish we had been about fifty percent smarter, to tell you the truth. We didn't hold back as many as we should. We were just so glad to sell them.

KEVIN: What it was, was the money didn't really matter — just enough to break even. That we had finally published our own book, we were so tickled with that.

PETER: That we were even able to make our money back and break even was a real rush, because we fully expected to sell maybe five hundred of them and sit on the rest of them for the remaining time.

LAMAR: *It's probably the most successful self-published comic to come along in several years, since CEREBUS. What do you two think is responsible for the fantastic success?*

KEVIN: What do we think accounts for it? I'd love to say, "Oh, they love our artwork," but a lot of people say it's just the need for something different. They really enjoy it because it's different. A lot of people come up and say, "I heard the name of this book and I had to have it." The name is what brings the people to the book. Like I said before, what we want to shoot for is to keep it different, offbeat — something that will keep people coming back. I love my X-MEN, and I love my CRISIS ON INFINITE EARTHS, I like all those, but it's nice to get away and maybe read the TURTLES, just for something different.

LAMAR: *Do you think the reasons are pretty much the same, Peter?*

PETER: I also think very strongly that the name is important, because so many people who don't even read comics laugh when they hear the name. They chuckle. Even if it doesn't go beyond a chuckle, there are a lot of people for whom it does, and they go out and buy the book just to see what the hell it's all about.

KEVIN: Usually, when you tell somebody the name of the book, it's like, "What?!" It's the first reaction. Like, "Yeah, we draw TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES," and ninety-nine times out a hundred the answer is, "What?!"

LAMAR: *The name does provoke a laugh. The contents, on the other hand, are played pretty seriously. Is it intended as a serious dramatic tragedy of modern turtles in a struggle for existence, or is it a little tongue-in-cheek?*
(Long pause.)

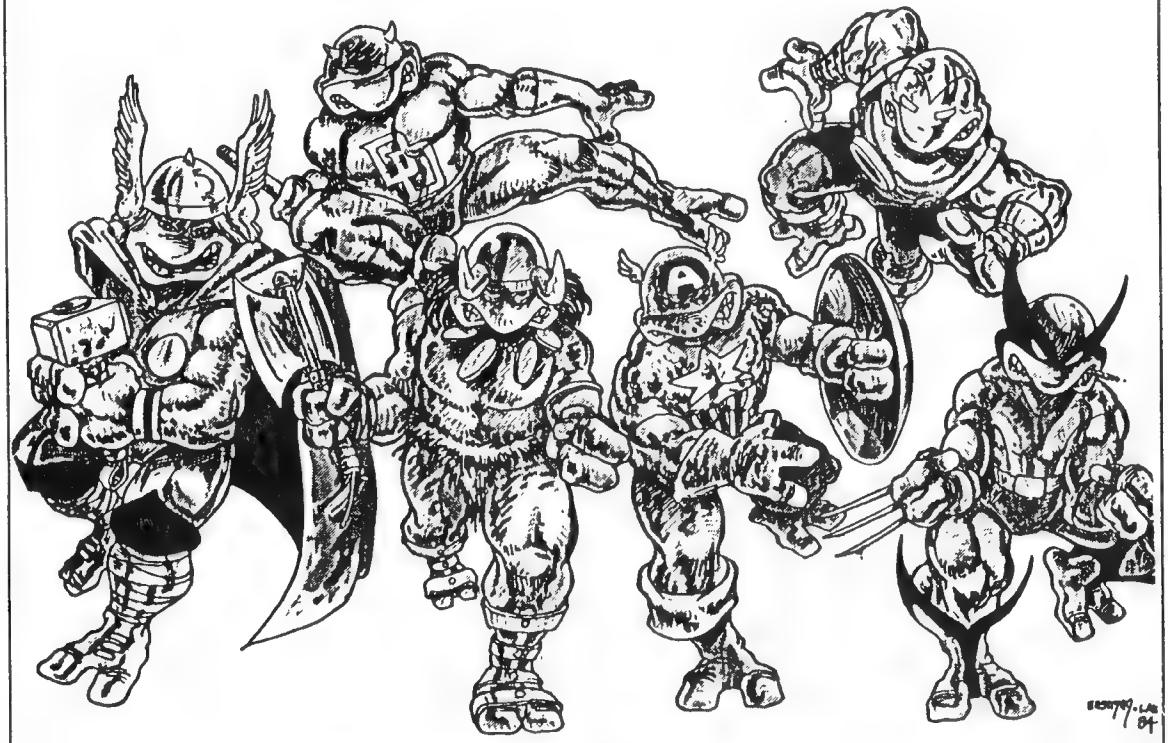
parodied Miller and DAREDEVIL."

KEVIN *(to Peter)*: Umm... tongue-in-cheek to start?
PETER: Yeah... I mean, obviously the first issue was a parody of some very specific elements...
LAMAR: *Like —?*
PETER: Oh, **Frank Miller**, RONIN...
KEVIN: The teenage mutants, then the ninja craze, and then the animal aspect of, oh, like CEREBUS, the crowd that CEREBUS draws.
LAMAR: *Was there an intentional CEREBUS parody in there as well?*
PETER: Only in the most oblique sense. It wasn't direct at all.
KEVIN: No. **Sim** parodied CONAN and **Barry Smith** when he did his book, like we parodied **Miller** and his DAREDEVIL and RONIN when we did our book, and we were maybe hoping to achieve the same type of notice.

LAMAR: *So it started out as a parody the first issue, and now you're on your fourth issue. Is it still parody?*
KEVIN: Definitely.
PETER: The parody elements in the book, as you noticed, aren't really strong. I mean, they're not intense. I don't know if you've read that **Harvard Lampoon** parody of THE LORD OF THE RINGS —

Left: Peter Laird, Right: Kevin Eastman, together with their favorite reading material.

LAMAR: *BORED OF THE RINGS?*
PETER: Yeah. That's like every sentence is dense with parody. I think that only works if you're very, very clever. I personally don't feel clever enough to maintain a consistently wonderful parody all the way through.
KEVIN: There were some parodies just in the style it was done in, like that DAREDEVIL thing in the origin. You know, where the person gets hit in the eyes with this radioactive ooze. That's a parody. But the story is an original idea. We just want to keep getting more original.
PETER: I like to feel that the humor is kind of incidental in the story. There are little



Coming next: Teen Mutant Turtle Barbarian Avengers?

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"I want to do an issue of DAREDEVIL."

flashes of it. The story is pretty straightforward. When you read it, you have to — well, I don't know if you *have* to, but you should — no, I won't even say you *should* — but you *might* chuckle at the fact that these protagonists are turtles, but they're going through the motions of this very straightforward adventure story and, at least to my mind, there's a certain amount of humor in that.

KEVIN: It's underlying humor.

PETER: Yeah.

KEVIN: Hidden.

PETER: I think too many parodies aren't successful because they're so crammed with parody, so intense, like that BORED OF THE RINGS book. I'm not saying that it isn't successful, but it's heavyhanded, just too much parody.

LAMAR: *It also sounds like you're moving somewhat in the same direction that Dave Sim took eventually. If you mention to most people today that CEREBUS started out as a parody of CONAN and Barry Smith, they'd say, "What?!"*

PETER: That's true. The book will evolve. It already has since the first issue — you couldn't say that #2 or #3 is a parody of anything really specific.

LAMAR: *What are your future plans for the book?*

PETER: Megasuccess. *(Laughter.)* No, just kidding.

LAMAR: *"No?" You won't take it if it's thrust on you?*

KEVIN: Naw. If it comes —

PETER: — total refusal.

LAMAR: *You're doing this for Ethiopia, right?*

KEVIN: Yeah, we're sending all our proceeds. *(Laughter.)* Yeah, we're all Ethiopians right now, feeding our own needs.

PETER: "We are our own Ethiopians," is that what you said? *(Laughter.)* We need the money to live right now.

KEVIN: Our plans for the future are to just keep enough people buying it so that we can keep drawing it.

PETER: And keep people entertained by it. If it ceases to be entertaining, it probably will cease to sell and we'll have to go do something else.

KEVIN: We'll have to go back to cooking.

PETER: Cookin' lobsters and makin' sandwiches.

LAMAR: *Is it on a regular schedule at this point?*

PETER: Yes, there should be two more regular issues of the book this year. We have the FUGITOID book scheduled for mid-year — or, actually, September — and two mini-series, one-issue series. The first was RAPHAEL, and then there's going to be a special Christmas story featuring MICHAELANGELO.

Yesterday: Mutant Ninja Turtles, today: Mutant Punk Turtles, tomorrow: Mutant Republican Turtles?

KEVIN: It looks like we've got a book coming out every two months from now 'til the end of year. The FUGITOID book, which comes out in August, is going to continue into issues #5 and #6 of the TURTLES.

LAMAR: *Smart planning. Do you think we'll ever see the TURTLES' SECRET WARS? (Laughter.)*

PETER: Funny you said that! Read issues #5 and #6!

KEVIN: Yeah!

PETER: No, really — there's a certain element of similarity in those issues.

LAMAR: *I guess that gives your readers something to look forward to in #5 and #6. How about you guys? Any future plans beyond the TURTLES and FUGITOID?*

KEVIN: I want to do an issue of DAREDEVIL. Just to do something different, as long as it pertains to drawing. I'd love to try a mainstream book. I want to get a year or so under my belt so that I've got the experience to be as good, to do a nice one.

PETER: I think you'd do a great DAREDEVIL.

KEVIN: Yeah. Good splattering.

LAMAR: *How about you, Peter? What are your goals?*

PETER: I'm having fun with the TURTLES and I want to continue doing them, but I

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"My uncle wrote a check, said: 'Go for it!'"

would like to continue what I was doing before the TURTLES. Not the things that I was doing commercially, drawing vegetables and boring stuff like that, but more fantastic things — in the realm of the fantastic. I would like to do a revival of **Jack Kirby**'s DEMON character, Etrigan.

LAMAR: *By the way, whose idea was all the Duo-tone board? That's not seen much in comics any more.*

PETER *(to Kevin):* It was your idea. You saw some of that stuff that I had and then you — wasn't that it? You saw a couple of samples of it?

KEVIN: Yeah. I love the effect. We knew from the beginning that we would only be able to afford a black-and-white book and we wanted to do something that would make this black-and-white book look different from the others, something other than regular pen-and-ink, and the tones were a perfect outlet.

LAMAR: *I thought you were Roy Crane fiends. The BUZ SAWYER approach.*

KEVIN: That's some beautiful stuff, it really is.

LAMAR: *What are you up to circulation-wise on the combined printings for #1, #2, and #3?*

KEVIN: Combined printings of the very first issue? Thirty-five —

PETER: First printing of #1 was three thousand, second printing of #1 was six thousand, and the third printing is going to be thirty-five thousand.

LAMAR: *Thirty-five thousand?*

KEVIN: Yeah. Get this — first printing of #3, we're up to fifty-thousand books.

PETER: And #2's first printing was fifteen thousand, the second was thirty thousand.

LAMAR: *That's pretty impressive. You're outselling CEREBUS right now.*

PETER: I guess we are. The circulation of CEREBUS is twenty-something thousand. We've got forty-two thousand of the #3s sold already, pre-publication. I have a feeling that in the coming months we'll probably get some back orders for maybe another ten thousand. I'm not trying to brag, that's just the way it seems to be working out. With the #2s, we still have back orders. I hate talking casually about it, because this time last year we were just finishing inking the pages for this book — and in no way, shape, or form did we ever imagine that it would be this successful. It blows our minds.

KEVIN: For that matter, to have been paid to come down to Atlanta to do a convention was never even thought of as a possibility.

LAMAR: *Hopefully, it will be the first of many for you. Have the TURTLES appeared in other countries yet? Europe, maybe?*

PETER: Not *published*, but I did send a couple of the review copies of the first one after it was published to this Swedish fanzine GRAPHIC DREAMS and they did a review of it, a four-page review. They sent us a copy a couple of months ago of this big review in Swedish. We were even mentioned on the cover.

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle regrets, Raphael-style.

KEVIN: We got somebody to interpret it for us —

PETER: That was great. This guy who lived in Sharon, Connecticut, translated it.

LAMAR: *And they said you were better than Ingmar Bergman, right?*

PETER: Yeah, you must have read it. *(Laughter.)* Just kidding. It was neat, though.

LAMAR: *Well, this seems to have exhausted all my copious notes here — is there anything else either of you would like to add?*

KEVIN: TURTLES COME ALIVE IN '85! That's our motto for this year, thanks to Peter's brother, Bruce.

PETER: My brother Bruce has to be one of our most devoted fans. He sends us a postcard almost every day. He does these little collages where he cuts pictures out of the book and makes Xeroxes of them and colors them in and sends them to us. Just to keep us going.

LAMAR: *Sounds like a real devoted fan. When do they let him out of the asylum?* (Laughter.) *How old is he?*

PETER: He's thirty-four. It sounds a little stranger than it actually is.

KEVIN: He *is* our Number One fan. it's very inspiring to have him behind us.

PETER: He thinks it's neat and wants to encourage us.

LAMAR: *Kevin, your Uncle Quentin, who provided some of the initial cash outlay for #1, must be delighted with the success of the TURTLES.*

KEVIN: Yeah. He got his bucks back, but it was more important to him to see us get off the ground. When we asked to borrow money from him, he said, "I'll give you the money. When you come up with a package, I'd like to see it. All I require is that you give me the money back that I gave you —"

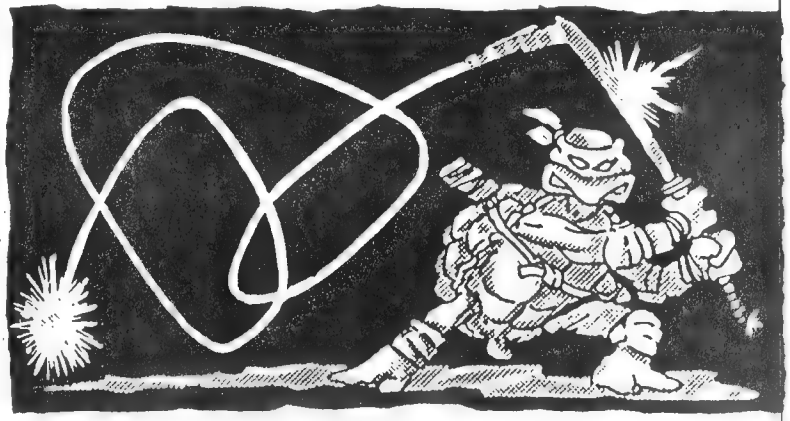
PETER: A no interest loan.

KEVIN: No interest. My uncle is a real nice guy. So we brought him over to the house and showed him what we had done, what we wanted to do. We had everything thought out, all the advertising, the book itself — we made up photocopies of it to show him what it was going to look like. He wrote us a check and said, "Go for it."

LAMAR: *You didn't give him a percentage point?*

PETER: No, but we're going to.

KEVIN: Right now, with issue #3 coming out, we're finally going to make a profit ourselves. Wtih that, we're definitely going to give him some more money.



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"Everyone hoped I could do BLONDIE."

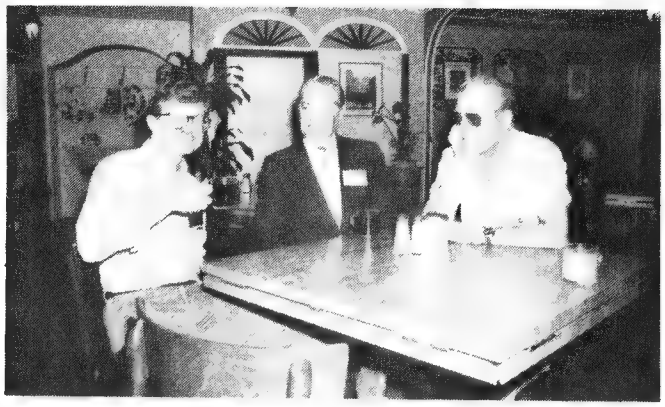


Photo: Jackie Estrada

Left to right: Archie Goodwin, Murphy Anderson and Stan Drake.

STAN DRAKE

In part one, Stan revealed his glamorous Hollywood past and how comics almost lost him to the silver screen. Here in part two: Stan talks with interviewer Shel Dorf about the international history of KELLY GREEN and how he scored one of the greatest cartooning coups possible . . .

SHEL: *Okay. Well, let's talk about KELLY GREEN. How did this KELLY GREEN graphic novel series get started?*

STAN: Leonard Starr did a comic book called CANNONBALL COMEDY for Tintin comics in Belgium. **Mike Greg**, who does ACHILLE TALON (pronounced ah-Shil-lay ta-loe/n) . . .

SHEL: *What?*

STAN: That's French for Achilles' heel. it's the fourth biggest, most successful strip in the world.

SHEL: *Wow!*

STAN: The French government takes 78% in taxes — 78% of the money he gets — and *after* the government's 78%, **Mike Greg** makes $22,000 a month!

SHEL: *What in the world is this strip about?*

STAN: It's just a little blookie character. Over here it's called WALTER MELON, but **Greg** withdrew it because it didn't sell. In 14 months over here he sold 35 books. It's alien. It's slanted to Europe. Very popular — *really big!!* — all over Europe! But here, *zilch.*

Anyway, he was the editor at Tintin comics, where he did a story with Leonard. When he moved to Dargaud, he wanted Leonard to do a graphic novel. Not KELLY GREEN, because that wasn't even thought of yet, but *a* graphic novel. So, Leonard said, "I just got ANNIE. I can't do it now. I have to put all my effort into ANNIE. But, **Stan Drake** is a friend of mine — he does JULIET JONES, which is JULIETTE MONQUER in French . . ." And **Mike Greg** said, "Wail, of course eef you can get **Stan Drake**. I know zat JULIETTE is ver' popular . . ." So, **Mike Greg** went out on a limb and suggested to Dargaud International, the biggest publishing company in the world of that kind of material, that they hire this American artist to do a graphic novel. So, Leonard came to me, he said, "I've got the name. Her name is Kelly Green. How do you like that?" I said, "I love it. It's a color." He said, "Yeah, kelly green. But, it'll make a neat name." Then he went — she's this and she's that, and this is what happens, and that is what happens. "Do you want to do it?" I said, "Fine," so he went back to **Mike Greg** with it. **Mike Greg** said, "Let's do it." We arranged a fee and we started doing the book.

SHEL: *With Leonard writing and you drawing?*

STAN: Right, Leonard writing and me drawing.

SHEL: *And that was in 1980. Here we are in '84 — how's KELLY GREEN done so far?*

STAN: I've got four books out, with a fifth book almost completed — so, it's just been a little over a book a year.

SHEL: *When I talked to Leonard about this, he said that the American language edition was an afterthought — that you were trying first with the foreign market . . .*

STAN: Yeah. It had nothing to do with America at first. It was just for Europe. it was just to be for Europe.

SHEL: *How many books did they expect to sell?*

STAN: I think they printed up 5000 to start with — just to test it.

SHEL: *What did they sell for? What was the cover price?*

STAN: Over in Europe. I think it was $5.95 or something.

SHEL: *This is a full-color book about the size of?*

STAN: Probably about the size of PEOPLE MAGAZINE.

SHEL: *And every page in full color, on good paper?*

STAN: Yeah, on good paper. Nice, heavy stock — good coloring — it's called a graphic novel in the United States. It's called an album over there. They call all those novels albums. So, the foreign market looked good to us.

SHEL: *What languages was it printed in?*

STAN: Well, at first it was just in French.

"For 32 years I worked on JULIET JONES."

Then, they started to get other countries interested in it — and they wouldn't do it in another language until they got a bid from another country. And so, when Sweden would say, "We are interested in KELLY GREEN," then they would have it translated into Swedish. So, each country would come along, and finally we have, now, twelve foreign countries.

SHEL: *It's now more than 5000 copies?*

STAN: Yeah. It's probably 5000 copies per country to start with, per book.

STAN: Stan, do you and Leonard have conferences about the stories?

STAN: Yes. Well, our conferences usually take place over lunch, at the Towne Squire, just across the street from our little ol' studio. We talk about situations. Leonard has the basic idea — he's definitely a helluva writer. Leonard is very much the technician, and he knows *exactly* how to put it. But, sometimes he gets nonplussed about an interesting aspect — what can we do to make this a little more interesting, a little more exciting? My contribution — having sat back from the forest all this time, I can perhaps see the trees a little better than Leonard can. I'll throw a few ideas at him, like a think tank, and he'll say, *"That's it!"* Then, that's what we do. So, he uses me in that way. Just occasionally, however — not all the time. Maybe three or four times during the whole book.

SHEL: *Do you work this way with Elliot Caplin?*

STAN: No. It's all Elliot.

SHEL: *You've probably had storytelling on your mind for years, right?*

STAN: Oh yeah. I could write a JULIET JONES right now.

SHEL: *It's nice that you have this exchange. Does Leonard, in turn, have any input on the artwork?*

STAN: Leonard wants to leave me alone on that. He figures I know what I'm doing. He will, in some instances, suggest that I do this and that. There are some instances where he'll lay out a panel, because in his mind he's got the plot set up in such a way that this *has* to happen. In that case, he'll do a little thumbnail on the sheet and ask me to please follow that, because he's got to have it.

SHEL: *There are about four books now and a fifth one of the way. What did you find out after the first book went out? Did everything depend on the sales of the first one?*

STAN: They, over there, said that three books might tell you, but five books out would be an absolute accounting of where you're gonna go. If it's not taken off after five books, you have a flop. Three is supposed to be an indicator. Well, after all this time, because they're so slow in releasing books over there, we just have three books out in France — since April, 1984 — and only two books out in all the other countries. So, believe it or not, after all these years, it's *still* premature as to where we're going. They want to continue. The want to do book six. We know that — the telex has arrived. So, I really, at this stage, can't tell you how we are doing. We don't have enough books out yet.

SHEL: *Are there other types of romantic-mystery adventure books in this area, or are you unique in this type of album?*

STAN: We're unique to the extent that we have a female heroine.

SHEL: *Well, you certainly have some exciting visuals in these books. They're very sexy and very beautiful.*

STAN: Thank you. I gotta tell that there's an awful lot of books at the San Diego Comicon, an awful lot of books, that have exciting pages. My work — KELLY GREEN — has got to rank among the less exciting-looking pages of any of those books. I am not going to say that I've got very exciting pages. At least they're realistic looking — but not more exciting.

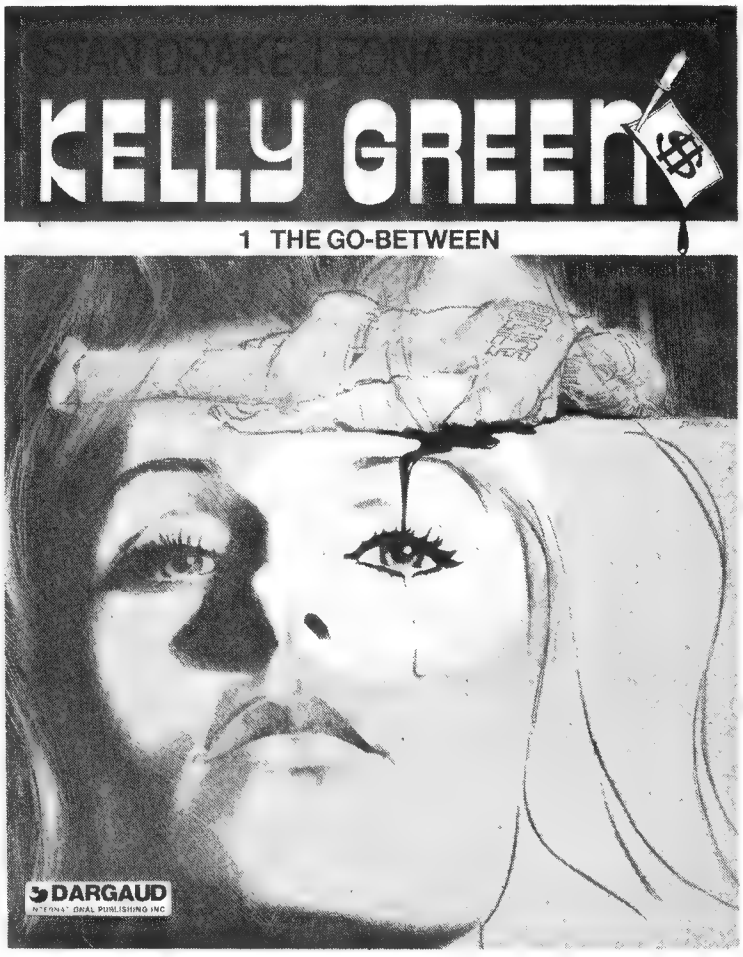
SHEL: *And yet, you told me that Dargaud is experimenting with distribution here. There are 60 test bookstores where they're trying out the albums —*

STAN: Yes.

SHEL:— *and, if they're popular sellers, then they're going into 1600 stores?*

STAN: Yeah. The graphic novel does have a chance to break through into the mainline bookstores. Whereas a comic book is a comic book — I don't care *what* you do to a comic book, to the American public a comic book is a child's comic book, and that is it. If they don't want comic books in their stores then they're not gonna do it. We *may* break ground here, with these graphic novels — which, if you open the cover, is *still* a comic book.

SHEL: *Your third wife is a beautiful blonde.*



KELLY GREEN, European publisher Dargaud's entree into the American market, by Leonard Starr and Stan Drake.

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BRET BLEVINS

"Dean Young is decision maker on BLONDIE."

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You showed us her picture. She looks a lot like Eve.

STAN: That's right. I married Eve Jones.

SHEL: *It sounds like a full life. Do you have any children?*

STAN: Yes. I have two children by my first wife, living out in California, in San Jose, and I have two children with my present wife — her children from a previous marriage. One's in college, and one's a senior in high school.

SHEL: *How do you manage to fit all of this work into your schedule? How many hours a week do you work? This trip to San Diego...*

STAN: Oh. This is the first five-day stretch I've had off in seven years, and it's taken me all this time to wind down. I'm just winding down now.

SHEL: *You're a very gifted man. You have to be true to your talent...*

STAN: Yeah. You gotta work hard. You can't sluff it off. I won't allow myself to do that. I won't sell myself short on anything. It's all economics. It's absolutely economics. I am doing the same work I did 25 years ago, but 25 years ago a Cadillac cost $4400. I have an actual bill of sale for a Cadillac I bought 25 years ago for $4400. That same Cadillac, 25 years later, goes for $24,500.

SHEL: *I would never pay that much for a used car!* (Laughter.)

STAN: A Chevrolet costs *$10,000* — a *Chevrolet.* This is what it is with everything. This is what's happened to me. I just have absolutely not been able to keep up with a house that was $75,000 fifteen years ago that is now $275,000.

SHEL: *What has been your reaction to the fans that you've come in contact with? You told me earlier that you mail your stuff away and never get any feedback.*

STAN: No, I don't — not on the newspaper stuff. Ever since I got into KELLY GREEN, and I've been out here at your fabulous San Diego Comicon, I've met 4,000 people. It is absolutely amazing to me that everybody who comes up to me says, "Boy, I've been a fan of yours for a long time," or, "Hi, **Mr. Drake**, I really appreciate your work." I've heard this all week long — never *knew* it existed.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

All during his stay in San Diego, Stan was forced to keep secret the fact that he was up for BLONDIE — a big career move. He just didn't know if it would happen for him. Well, it did. Stan is now back at home and hard at work, and Shel asks him to talk about BLONDIE...

SHEL: *How did anyone think of you for doing BLONDIE? It doesn't exactly fit in with your realistic style.*

Will Kelly be left out in the cold by American comic-book readers?

STAN: I have done a lot of portrait work over the years. This kind of work is beneficial to me in the task at hand, BLONDIE, because I'm actually doing "portraits" of characters created by another hand. Yes, for 32 years I worked in a strictly realistic style for JULIET JONES. During those years I also illustrated golf instruction for GOLF DIGEST MAGAZINE, and those illustrations had to be extremely precise in order to convey the golf swing in the lesson. It's this attention to minute detail that I'm bringing to BLONDIE, because there are specific rules to be observed in doing this feature.

SHEL: *Whose blind faith thought you could do BLONDIE?*

STAN: My own. I never thought about doing somebody else's feature, actually — but I did present three strips for syndication, cartoon style things, that were turned down. This was back in '77-'78. So, I always knew I could do this kind of work, even though the syndicates didn't take those strips. But, specifically, **Bill Yates, Frank Chilino** and **John Celardo**, from King Features, each suggested to **Dean Young** that he give me a try when he decided to change artists on BLONDIE. I don't think I had anyone's "blind faith." Everyone just hoped, of course, that I would be okay — and there are times when I questioned myself. Six months have passed since I began this work, and I am *still* learning — still trying to nail down the elusive look of this fabulous creation.

SHEL: *Did you read BLONDIE before the strip assignment came your way?*

STAN: Yes. All my life I've followed

"Dargaud Intl. is the biggest comic

BLONDIE. I've always enjoyed the tribulations of Dagwood and the crew. I was about ten-years-old when I first saw the strip, and I've watched with fascination its durability for 50 years.

SHEL: *Is BLONDIE as much fun to draw as it is to read?*

STAN: It is fun. I've always enjoyed a challenge — and this baby is one *big* challenge, boy! Every day I see myself getting into the flavor and feeling just a little bit more. I'm not trying to change it over to "Me"— I'm trying to read the great **Jim Raymond**'s mind. How would *he* have done it?

SHEL: *Do you use assistants?*

STAN: Yes. There is another artist who aids greatly in this fun-difficult operation — **Denis Lebrun**. He's been associated with **Dean Young** for the past three years. He sweetens up and inks the background. Sometimes he does Daisy, the dog. He's capable of turning out an entire strip or a Sunday page, and is just a joy to work with. There's a great deal of express mail expense involved here. It starts out in Florida, from the typewriter of **Dean Young**, comes up to Connecticut, then goes to **Denis Lebrun** in Vermont to be completed and lettered, and finally over to King Features in New York. Thank God for Federal Express' next day delivery!

SHEL: *Does Dean Young give you "stage directions"?*

STAN: Absolutely. I receive scripts of both the daily strips and the Sunday pages. A typical daily, with directions goes like this: **PANEL #1:** HERB AND DAGWOOD ARE ON THEIR STREET, WALKING HOME FROM WORK. DAGWOOD HAS A VERY DEPRESSED EXPRESSION AS HE FLAILS HIS ARMS IN HOPELESS GESTURES. HERB LOOKS STRAIGHT AHEAD WITH A BLANK EXPRESSION. And the copy will be written below.

An example of Stan Drake's art on BLONDIE. According to writer

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album publishing company in the world."

The Sunday page consists of twelve panels — and sometimes the entire family, including Daisy, is in every panel — all drawn from head to feet and fitted in, under, beside, and in front of the balloons. It's an engineering feat that can take as much as three days to complete.

SHEL: *BLONDIE has a traditional look — almost like a blueprint. Do you plan to change the panel compositions in any way?*

STAN: I don't have the authority to decide those things. **Dean Young** is the sole decision maker on sweeping changes, or keeping the traditional look which has proven successful for so long a time. If you want my opinion — as some country philosopher once commented: "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

SHEL: *Is there a certain period of Chic Young's work that you're using as a reference?*

STAN: When **Chic Young** died in 1973, **Jim Raymond**, his long-time assistant, took over the full art. He'd helped on BLONDIE since 1934. At this point, **Dean Young**, Chic's son, took on the feature as gag writer and co-worker with **Jim Raymond.** The signature on each daily and Sunday page became **Young & Raymond**. It's this period and style that Dean wishes to perpetuate. I am, in effect, trying to forge **Jim Raymond**'s style, as seen from 1972 to 1983. Dean feels the feature must move along with the times. He's softened much of the slapstick that was popular in the Twenties and Thirties. Today, Blondie wears fashions of the Eighties,and she'll be right there in whatever look the years bring about. Dagwood's given up the cuffs on his on his pants — as have we all — but his one-button shirt is here to stay.

SHEL: *Stan Drake, it's wonderful getting to know you!*

STAN: Thank you, Shel. It's been interesting going over the old territory.

Dean Young, the syndicate decided to use only one name in the by-line.

OH, NO! THERE MUST BE A MILLION BALL BEARINGS ALL OVER THE FLOOR!
I'VE GOT TEN SECONDS! I CAN STILL MAKE IT!
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"Lucasfilm has never said to me, 'You can't do this, these are our characters.'"

JO DUFFY

Jo Duffy has written almost every super-hero in the Marvel Universe. And her editorial credits are just as impressive. Beginning as the person who mailed art back to the artists in 1977, Jo has risen to her present position as Managing Editor of EPIC magazine and writer of the STAR WARS comic through a combination of drive, wit, imagination and tenacity.

In many respects, Jo has been a pioneer. Before her, there were almost no women who had any creative role in comics. Of that select group, none were in the editorial department. Jo broke that barrier and, in doing so, opened the industry's doors for more women with talent.

Having known Jo since 1977, I was struck with the fact that after all those years of hard knocks and dues paying, Jo is, if anything, even more witty and charming than ever before — which made this interview, conducted in a Chinese restaurant near the Marvel Bullpen, one of the most enjoyable experiences I've had in a long time...

DWIGHT JON ZIMMERMAN: *You've done quite a bit of stuff since you started at Marvel...*

JO DUFFY: My career's checkered. I joined the staff right at the beginning of 1977. I was hired to return the original art to the creators and to proofread. I sort of got in because I'd been working as a legal proofreader, and they needed a proofreader on the staff. **Archie Goodwin** hired me. At that time, he was the editor-in-chief, and **Jim Shooter** was the one and only editor — in those days, they called him the associate editor, but he was corallary to what all the editors are now. And as soon as there was an opening for an assistant editor, I took that — so, in fact, I was assistant editor with **Jim Shooter.** There was a whole crew of us and only one of him. When he became editor-in-chief, less than a year after I was hired, he decided that you really needed more than one editor in that seat under the editor-in-chief. So he hired a bunch, and I became assistant editor to **Bob Hall**, for the six months he was on staff, and then to **Allen Milgrom** for two-and-a-half years, before I joined EPIC as the associate editor. EPIC had a staff of only two in those days, and I worked my way up to managing editor when that position was created, and we hired an associate editor.

DWIGHT: *Which was you first series that you were regular writer on?*

JO: My first series was POWER MAN/IRON FIST, which I took about a year and a half after I joned Marvel. Up until then I'd done nothing but scrounge for every fill-in I could get my hands on. of course, it's the way of the world — none of my work appeared for that first year and a half, and right before I took on POWER/FIST I had, like, two comics come out in one day, and four more the week after that! A couple of the stories have only appeared in the last year or two — ones that I wrote back in my first year in the business. But POWER/FIST was my first regular writing assignment. I did that

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Jo Duffy
Born: 9 February 1954 — New York City. Coincides with Godzilla's birthday.
Residence: Long Beach, NY
Writing Credits: About everything. EPIC short stories, CRYSTAR, POWER MAN/IRON FIST, STAR WARS, THE MISFITS (new Marvel Universe spin-off).
Training: Wellesley College, B.A.; legal proofreading; comics fan
Editing Credits: (Marvel Comics:) David Kraft on SHE-HULK, ROM, TARZAN, DAREDEVIL, DR. STRANGE. (Epic Comics:) ELFQUEST, DREADSTAR, SWASHBUCKLERS, COYOTE, BLACK DRAGON, MARADA THE SHE-WOLF graphic novel, ELEKTRA mini-series, GROO THE WANDERER.
Favorite Holiday: Guy Fawkes Day
Favorite Magazine About Comics: None — I look at the pictures.
The World Needs More Of: Really good "bad" martial arts movies in English.
Last Request: The person who locates a video copy of KUNG-FU ZOMBIES will be my best friend forever — subject to local regulations.

Her mother was the first-born of Caesar.
Her father, a prince in his own land, a slave in Rome.
She was renowned for her courage and ferocity in an age that demanded courage and ferocity of all.

And when she needed them most, her strength and her bravery failed her.

MARADA™
THE SHE-WOLF

by Chris Claremont and John Bolton. A Marvel® Graphic Novel.
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"My career's checkered."

book for three and a half years, I think.

DWIGHT: *That was a pretty long tenure.*

JO: I think I'm the record-holder on both those characters, and their career is even more checkered than mine.

DWIGHT: *What sort of input did you get from editors as you started your writing career?*

JO: Well, the first bit of input I got from an editor — who was pretty lousy and left Marvel some time ago — was, "Don't!" That was also the *second* bit of input I got — also from somebody who's no longer with Marvel.

DWIGHT: *They were saying, "Don't be a writer," or —?*

JO: Yeah. They weren't saying this friendly advice to beginners like, "It's a dirty job." It was basically, "We don't want the competition." I was really shocked. There was a prevailing kind of dog-in-the-manger attitude among some of the senior writers at the time I joined. Junior writers, who have since become Marvel's senior writers — like **Chris Claremont** and **Bill Mantlo** — were just having a horrible time getting any kind of jobs whatsoever, and those of us who have since become, like, the second string of Marvel and who were trying to break in at the time, were getting no encouragement and a lot of put-downs from the people who probably should have been training us and helping us along. Am I bitter about that? Noooooo!

DWIGHT: *Has that changed, do you feel?*

JO: Yes and no. I feel that the people at Marvel, by and large — the people I work with now — are encouraging as hell to beginners, but I've noticed that those gentlemen I mentioned before — who are long gone from my life in any kind of a professional way — are still as hard as can be on beginners who come up to them and want advice and a chance.

DWIGHT: *So their personalities remain consistent?*

JO: Oh, yeah. It's just that they're no longer creating a logjam at the entryway to Marvel. On the other hand, there are more people at Marvel —**Jim Shooter** always very, very encouraging. Tough on me when I was a beginner, and needed it. Really sort of bloodied my nose about a lot of the early stories I was writing when I needed it, and I learned a lot from him. I learned a great deal from **Archie Goodwin. Denny O'Neil** was my longest-term editor, on POWER MAN/IRON FIST and a great teacher, and although **Stan Lee** had departed for the West Coast pretty much before I came to New York and started working as a writer, I find him a miracle.

I only got his input directly a few times, but Stan can verbalize what makes people's stuff good, very, very concisely. He has an amazing perception. People look at Stan's work — and they look at Stan — and they see the Madison Avenue flash and the dazzle and the hip patter, but he really has a gift for sort of distilling what's important in things, and a couple of times we editors would have meetings with him where he'd sit down and actually do a rap for us, tell us what made something work, things like — never have a series concept tht you are unable to summarize in one sentence. And he sat there and did it for twelve of our most successful titles, just sort of at random. We'd throw a name at him: IRON MAN. (This was several years ago.) "He's a guy who is in the world's most powerful iron lung." DAREDEVIL: "He's a guy who is blind and has compensated for it." He was actually able to tell what it is about these characters — in one sentence — that is going to make them work. The X-MEN were people who don't really belong in the human race, but don't fit in anywhere else, and so they fit together.

I also learned a great deal about visual storytelling from **John Buscema**. Man, many years ago **Shooter** brought John in to the office one night just to teach artists how to be fast and good. And it was pretty funny. I sat in on it, actually, because one of the ar-

How much freedom does a comic book writer really have with a movie property? The cover of STAR WARS #103 by Cynthia Martin and Steve Leialoha.

"You can never catch Buscema swiping."

CHAPTER IX: MYSTERY OF THE MINE!
I'M TRAPPED!
LORD, I NEVER SAW ANYONE GET SO WORKED UP ABOUT LOSIN' A FEW LOUSY PETS!
WAIT! WHAT'S THAT?
IT IS...OTHERWORLDLY.
THE RITUAL IS COMPLETE!
STEP INTO PELLUCIDAR, PRINCESS.
NOW!
IT'S HIM! IT'S JUST GOT TO BE--
--THE MAD ARAB!
UNGH!
THE SIGHT THAT SO DISTRACTED SIMON ALSO RIVETS TARZAN'S ATTENTION!
EH--?
IMMEDIATELY ASSESSING THE WICKED SCENE--
--THE APE-MAN ACTS!
HAMAD HAS FAILED ME!
HIS SOUL SHALL FRY IN HELL, ALONG WITH THOSE OF THE ACCURSED INTERLOPERS!

How to tell a story visually by the artist other artists copy, John Buscema, from TARZAN #16, written by David Kraft and inked by Klaus Janson.

tists couldn't make it that night, so he asked me to sit in with a tape recorder. And it was really funny, because **Buscema** found he had a room full of artists and one writer, and he wanted to throw me out, but he let me stay. And at the end of the lecture, the message was — you can be as good as **John Buscema** if you practice for thirty years the way he did. But, on the other hand, he also talked a lot about how he approaches the work, and why he felt he was not derivative of anybody else. Why he's the one other people borrow from. You can never catch **Buscema** swiping — but you can spot lots of artists swiping **Buscema** — and it was a revelation to me. Here's a man who never looks at other comic-book artists except in admiration or for reference. When he wants to figure out how to draw something, he finds the real thing or a good photo of it that hasn't been used before. And he subscribed to the fashion magazines, and all the sports magazines, and I imagine his entire home is a swipe file. He's *looking* all the time. As a writer it gave me an understanding of what I ought to be telling the artist I was working with, if I wanted him to draw what I saw in my head. And it gave me an understanding as an editor of what I should be looking for in artists' work, and what I should be telling them. It's something I already knew as a writer: Don't just read comic books. Go out and *live* your life and learn from that, or read other writers. Read novels and newspapers. Go to plays and movies. You know, comic books are minimalism. What you see in comic books is only the surface, and if you want there to be any structure there, you've got to have learned it from some place other than comic books and know what's the best — am I making any sense?

DWIGHT: *Yes.*

JO: The best parts are to take and put in there.

DWIGHT: *Writing comics is like shorthand, where you convey what is happening in as little as three words — or one word, if the art demands it.*

JO: I think that's where you get the difference between the good writers and the writers who may have it on the surface, but aren't really there. The good ones are the ones who have the whole novel worked out in their heads and then they figure out which ten sentences to give you, to make it work, as opposed to people who give you ten great-sounding sentences, and if you look underneath you realize they're just sort of floating there in the air with no legs underneath.

DWIGHT: *Right, right. With John Buscema's school and the Joe Kubert school — have you encountered graduates and, if so, do you notice any difference in the way they work compared to people off the street?*

JO: To tell you the truth, I don't know that I've worked with any **Buscema** graduates. I don't think his school was in existence that long. The finest young artist I worked with — in fact, somebody I would always work with, given my first choice — is **Ron Frenz**. And he is very, very **Buscema**-inspired. From **John Buscema**, from **Sal Buscema**, from Ron, himself, and from people who've learned form the **Buscemas** like **Kerry Gammill**, another of my favorites — what you get is very, very solid understanding of the human figure and how it's constructed and how it moves. And also of how to tell a story visually. How to give the writer in pictures everything that you need to see what's going on. You can look at a **Buscema** or a **Buscema** admirer's page and be able to get the gist at least physically of what's going on, as part of the flow of the pictures, before the writer has even done the dialogue. The **Kubert** people — I've only worked really closely with a few **Kubert** graduates, like **Jan Duursema, Tom Mandrake, Rick Veitch, Steve Bissette** — and what I've noticed is that there's one element that runs consistently throughout the **Kubert** school. it's not so much in how they approach storytel-

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"I no longer look for others to be like me."

ling, but that their sense of layout is very distinctive. While there are many stylistic differences in terms of how each individual handles the actual drawing, all of them seem to take the approach of not simply drawing the individual panels, but composing each page into an overall design.

DWIGHT: *Since your career has been going simultaneously as an editor and as a writer, have you noticed one facet spilling over into the other?*

JO: Absolutely. As a matter of fact, initially it was a negative influence.

DWIGHT: *How so?*

JO: If I saw something that a writer who was working for me was doing — this was mostly back when, as **Al Milgrom's** assistant I edited several of the books myself — sometimes I had to pull back and ask myself: Is this wrong or is it merely not how *I* would have done it? I'm afraid sometimes I may have erred on the side of "not how I would have done it," at least early on. I think that it's been a very, very good influence as I've gotten more experienced — as an editor, I no longer look for other people to be like me. At least, I don't think I do. But I do look to see: have they solved the same problems that every writer should solve when doing a story? On the other hand, I pre-edit myself when I write, so that I think I save a lot of problems for my editors.

One thing, though, that being an editor has not done — it has not made me prompt. I'm a deadline problem. I'm sorry. That's life. But on the other hand, editors have commented to me that they don't have much editing to do when they get my stuff, which is very nice, flattering to hear and makes me happy. I think the reason that I take so long to deliver in the first place is that I'm pre-editing myself every step of the way, and the work takes me twice as long.

This is something **Jim Shooter** and **Stan Lee** in particular drove into me — and they're so right. No matter how long a series has run, and how many readers it has, people ought to be able to pick up any given issue of something and follow it, even if they're seeing it for the first time. I think some of the most successful stories in the world — not necessarily comics, although certainly the best comics — movies, novels and what-have-you, don't begin at the beginning. They begin after the action has started rolling, and leave you to pick up what's going down. You know, STAR WARS opens in the middle of a space battle, and through the dialogue we sort of learn what 'droids are by seeing them talk; we see the blasters fired, so that we know that they're weapons; someone identifies the Princess by name; Darth Vader comes in, he and the Princess have some wonderful dialogue and actually, the whole time, we're being filled in with information.

DWIGHT: *We get the whole set-up.*

JO: CASABLANCA: Rick's Place. We get the establishing visual shot, we see the title, peole talk about Rick, and we learn so much by inference about this guy's checkered career and what kind of guy he is — sort of obliquely, without being aware that we're being told: here's who **Humphrey Bogart** is playing here. What's great about CASABLANCA is that it's about when someone begins to break his own pattern, and yet, they manage, by just a couple of flashbacks, and what other people say about him, to tell us what the pattern has been, and why his current behavior is remarkable, without us ever having to see — things like that.

That's where the writer and the editor in me are always going hand-in-hand. Every time I'm reading a story, I watch to see, has my writer told me everything I need to know, if this is the first time I've met these charac-

An example of the distinctive Kubert school sense of layout by former student Steve Bissette.

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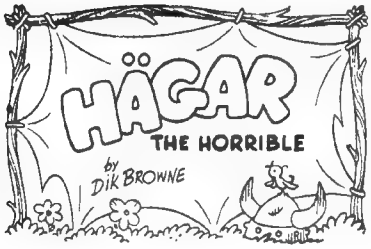

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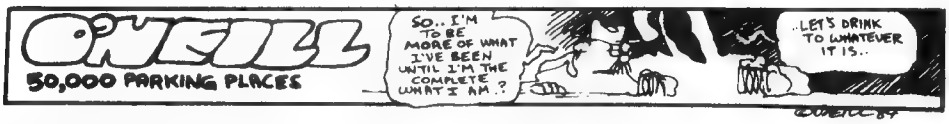

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"The beauty of Japanese comics is storytelling."

ters? In EPIC ILLUSTRATED it often is, because we do so many self-contained short stories. And are they telling me more than I need to know? Am I learning about somebody's dead aunt so-and-so, who is not at all germane to his emotions or his actions in this situation? Does she need to be here? Does she enrich the story, or is it just that hardcore fans of the series remember dead aunt so-and-so and they want her in there? I do that to myself, I do that for my editors before I get my work to them, and I try to watch for it in my writers before I pass a script or a plot.

DWIGHT: *Since you are an editor and a writer, as well, isn't that an exhausting schedule?*

JO: Yes.

DWIGHT: *How do you manage?*

JO: It's probably part of why I'm always late. How I manage is my head is on the job a lot of the time that my body isn't. For me, sitting down at the typewriter is the least part of the writing work that I have to do. It's while I'm walking down the street, or having a conversation with someone who bores me enough that my mind begins to wander — terribly rude of me, but that's life, kids. Well, when I'm riding the train back and forth, because I have about a four-hour round trip commute from my home every day, my head is working on the story. I used to think I was very abnormal; in fact, I'm just a typical writer. I'm kind of a Walter Mitty, in that scenarios are always strolling through my head, and it wasn't until I'd been a writer for about a year and a half that I realized, even though these scenarios were about generic people, or about Jo-people, I could learn to recognize that phrase that was strolling around in my head as something that could be appropriate for Luke Cage to say. If, like, I was replaying an argument I just lost with somebody, in my mind, I'd suddenly realize this is something that Iron Fist could say to his lawyer, and it would sound so much better than when I said it, and it would pull that story together. So always listening to what I'm saying and listening to what I'm thinking and listening to what other people say, does a lot of my job for me. I type quickly and badly, but usually when I sit down to type, the plot or the pictures or the words are already in my head, and it's only a matter of physical labor getting it down on paper.

DWIGHT: *In essence, what you're saying is that the experiences you've had in life are giving you hooks —*

JO: It isn't even completely drawn from life. Frankly, I love to read, I love to watch movies and some television, and I'll get very caught up in characters other writers have created, and begin playing with how I would have handled that scene if I had done it. And, as I do it, other people's people mutate into *my* people in my head and I'll be able to take how I would have handled such-and-such a situation, had I written it, and use it later myself in some completely different context. My head is just like a conglomeration of story bits that I'm always trying to pull together into twenty-two pages.

DWIGHT: *You mentioned earlier, as advice for people trying to get into the business, that you should read things other than Marvel and DC comics. I've noticed on the wall in your office, you have a lot of Japanese animation cels and that sort of thing — what got you interested in that?*

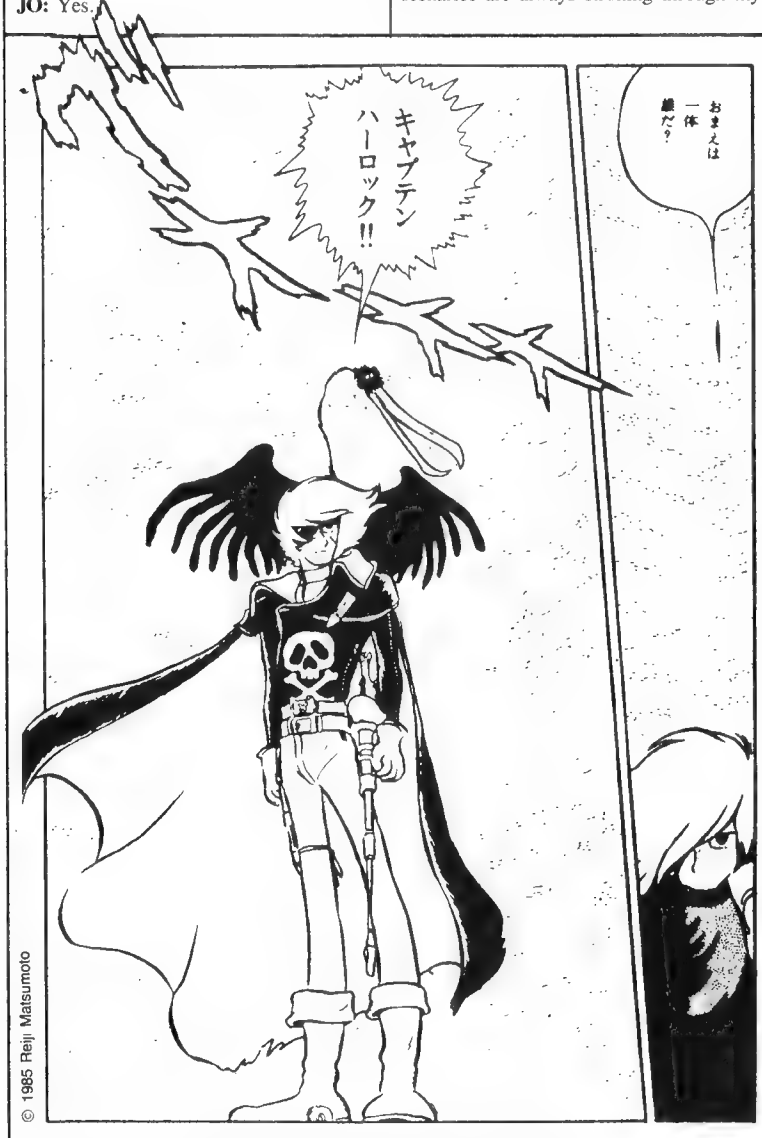
JO: Actually, it's become very chic to like Japanese comics and animation, but it's sort of a lifelong passion of mine. Everyone in the business talks about the artists who are influenced by the Japanese. I, as a writer, think I have been influenced, more than anyone, by the Japanese. When I was about then, — by rights, ten years old is too old for animated cartoons, that's the "American" way — but I had two animated series that were my great, guilty pleasures. They were called ASTRO BOY and EIGHTH MAN.

DWIGHT: *I remember ASTRO BOY.*

JO: I was crazy about them both —

DWIGHT: *Did you see KIMBA, THE WHITE LION?*

JO: KIMBA I never saw when I was a child. I knew it existed, but I think it was on at the wrong time of day. ASTRO BOY and EIGHTH MAN were both on after I got



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Space Pirate Captain Harlock by Matsumoto.

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home from school, but before it was time for me to do my homework. And I would catch them at least a couple of days a week. They killed me. I mean, these little cartoony people — but such drama in the stories, a fair amount of violence —

DWIGHT: *Lots of action.*

JO: — but really carefully thought out. Not just the action, but the emotion that went on between people was very, very beautiful, and unlike much that I was used to seeing. And then somebody told me these were made in Japan, which I couldn't believe. It turned out that EIGHTH MAN was actually a series called 8 MAN (sic), in Japan, and ASTRO BOY was TETSUWAN ATOM, which is MIGHTY ATOM. Absolutely *the* comic strip in Japan, and the animated series. They just edited out some of the violence and dubbed it. It was the work of **Osamu Tezuka**. Fantastic guy. He's a doctor, and he's sort of the **Stan Lee** and **Jack Kirby** of Japan — he's the **Walt Disney** of Japan.

DWIGHT: *Whoa! All in one person?*

JO: Everybody, yeah. Just amazing guy. I'm very, very upset because once we were both at a huge convention and I ran into him. I was surrounded by Marvel fans — he was alone, didn't have his translator — and I didn't know a word of Japanese and couldn't say anything to him. So all I could do is give him a big smile. And I always regretted that I didn't just ask the fans to stand back and go up and try to communicate and tell him how much I'd always admired his work. Those series were a seminal influence on my approach to stories in my childhood; in fact, not knowing about copyright infringement or what-have-you, I distinctly recall writing a story when I was ten about a character who I'd cribbed out of there. Not one of the main characters, but a character Astro Boy met in one episode. And obviously my teacher would never have caught that, so the whole thing passed without a murmur. But with the advent of home videotaping and what-have-you, more and more Japanese comics and animation material began to get into this country. When I was in college, and especially after I started working for Marvel, I got access to it. My older brother and my younger sister both studied Japanese, which was available in my high school, and it didn't interest me. It didn't occur to me at the time that this would be a great access to this material that I liked so much. I wasn't thinking that far ahead. At the time, I thought I was going to be an attorney.

DWIGHT: *Boy, did you take a strange turn.*

JO: My brother, Malachy, lived in Japan for several years, and I guess he remembered I liked that stuff, so he got me some of it while he was over there. Of course, Japanese animation and comics had progressed about fifteen years since the stuff I had loved as a child was being done, and I was just blow away. I found two Japanese bookstores here in New York that I absolutely love, particularly the Zen Bookstore on Fifth Avenue, and also Kinokuniya in Rockefeller Center. Especially Zen. And I would go over there a couple of times a week and buy the material as it came in.

Tetsuwan Atamu (Mighty Atom) a.k.a. "Astro Boy" by Osamu Tezuka.

Finally, I got my courage up and actually made friends with one of the clerks named Mogami, who was really very, very nice to me, and to **Frank Miller**. At that time, Frank wasn't at all interested in the SF/fantasy animation that I was, but he was very into some of the samurai comics, like KOZURE OKAMIO. And Frank found out that he could order comics from Japan, and he told me this. Between knowing that the material was available on order and the friendship of Mogami, who could help us find what we wanted, and even direct our attention to new stuff — well, after that, it was just party time. Since then I've begun to study the Japanese language at long last, and I've become very, very interested in the Japanese dramas, the live-action dramas, almost to the extent that it's eclipsed my interest in animation, or equalled it. I also like the music, the fashion, the singers — I'm sort of astonished and delighted how much, in terms of style and story, is going on in Japanese entertainment.

DWIGHT: *Can you now read some of the Japanese comics that you have?*

JO: The beauty of the Japanese comics is visual storytelling. Many of them blow us out of the water on that. It is not for me to say whether or not they draw well. For my purposes they draw beautifully, because I love cartoony, stylized, extremely energetic art, which is what you get a lot of over there. It comes out of historical growth of the pictograph alphabet, plus the fact that their favorite art has always been extremely spare and well-designed. Where Europe was doing oil paintings and Greece was doing sculpture, the Japanese were doing woodcuts and ink paintings. Again, a kind of minimalism that comes from its needs — in Japan, comics are weekly, rather than monthly.

DWIGHT: *Ooooo.*

JO: A good seller will sell a million copies a week, and the stories, instead of being twenty pages, will be fifty or sixty pages, and they use all those panels to just do detail — the art is very cinematographic, and as a

"Don't ask me what a woman's viewpoint is!"

result of the cinematography in the comics, once you get used to reading right-to-left as opposed to left-to-right, you can see what's happening much of the time. However, you miss the subtlety and the richness of the language and *why* people are doing things. But though you miss the subtleties and a lot of the motivation and a lot of characterization, but you can see what people are doing — so I've always been able to read to that extent. Now I can read more, but not really enough. I've been studying Japanese, as I said, for a year and a half. I think I'm about six months behind on the homework right now, although I keep going to lectures.

It's a shame that kids in school, when they're *able* to learn and study, don't have the kind of motivation that you get once you're out in the real world and find something that you want in a language you don't speak. God, what a motivator it is! My current teacher, she's just terrific, but it's so funny — she's Japanese, her husband is French. He doesn't speak much Japanese, she doesn't speak much French. The language of the household is English —

DWIGHT: (Laughter.) *And the children probably speak all three languages fluently. You've got an added problem — unlike, say, French where you're at least working on the same letter-shapes — you have to memorize these whole different symbols for Japanese.*

JO: It's wonderful. The Japanese have got four different alphabets. They have ours, which they call Romanji, it infuriates me that, very often after I've painstakingly read something and am so proud of myself, I find that the same word is on the pages elsewhere in Romanji! Then they have two alphabets that work identically, and I adore them. They're phonetic, there are no irregulars, I love them. They're called hiragana and katakana, and except that the actual symbols are different, they function exactly the same way. The same number of symbols cover all possible sounds. Doing things with these alphabets is like cryptography. Then there's the Kanji. The Kanji is the modern version of the alphabet that was originally Chinese — where one little box with twenty squiggles in it can mean either one syllable or an entire concept, depending. And, at the moment, I should know about 100 of those. I could only swear to 40 of them, and you're supposed to know 1000 before you're considered literate. At least, I think it's 1000.

DWIGHT: *Whoa!*

JO: I can usually — the first ones I always learn are the Kanji that appear in the names of either writers and artists, or singers. I look along a rack of tapes or a rack of books and I go, "Wait a minute, I've seen that emblem, that looks like it might be the work of —" and pull if off the shelf.

DWIGHT: *So, do you plan to go to Japan?*

JO: Oh, yes! I'll go as soon as I can. EPIC has benefitted at least a little bit from this passion of mine, in that we've made contacts with some very fine Japanese cartoonists — among the best in the country — and they work for us when they can, although they're very, very busy. And I could, for business purposes, justify a trip right now. Also, a lot of my friends are Japanese, and many of them have gone back to Japan since I met them here in New York. I'd dearly love to see them. It's a question of when and how.

DWIGHT: *I'm really happy to see that EPIC*

WHY... YOU'RE THE PILOT OF THE MILLENNIUM FALCON! CHEWBACCA THE WOOKIEE IS YOUR PARTNER!
THAT'S TRUE, BUT...
A LEGENDARY PILOT AND SMUGGLER... AND WHAT A NAVIGATOR!
... BLEW UP THE DEATH STAR! WHY, THEY NEVER COULD HAVE DEFEATED THE GALACTIC EMPIRE, WITHOUT YOUR HELP!
WELL, YEAH, BUT...
AND YOU'RE MODEST, AND EVERYTHING!
MAYBE WORKING WITH THESE KIDS ISN'T GOING TO BE SO BAD...
WAIT TILL WE TELL ALL OUR FRIENDS WE ACTUALLY GOT TO MEET THE FAMOUS GENERAL--
LANDO CALRISSIAN!
5

Han Solo meets the Zeltrons, based on an actual case of mistaken identity when convention fans mistook Jo for artist June Brigman. From STAR WARS #95. Art by Cynthia Martin and Steve Leialoha.

© 1985 Lucasfilm Ltd.

"I'm kind of a [female] Walter Mitty."

© 1981 MCG

is really not afraid to use this variety, and it's not just American artists.

JO: I think EPIC could be even more internatonal than it is, except that many foreign artists are only willing to sell American rights to their work, and presently at EPIC we have foreign editions going — so we need the rights for many countries. The French cartoonists in particular are the ones that most of my colleagues revere — but a lot of them can't work for us, simply because they only want to sell stories for us to use here, and not in any of our foreign editions.

We will use anybody who is good, and good is sort of whatever our audience and especially Archie and also to an extent me — decides. We'll define good, thank you. Archie has to judge what he thinks is good, and what the audience may think is good, and then we find out a year and a half later, when we've published it and seen the sales figures, whether we were right.

DWIGHT: *Yes, there is quite a backlog of material for EPIC, isn't there?*

JO: No.

DWIGHT: *I had heard at one time there was.*

JO: We didn't buy anything for two years.

DWIGHT: *Ye-ow!*

JO: But EPIC always has to have a certain amount of backlog because we're an anthology. And the needs of the format tend to dictate how many pages and what color in what style we can use in any issue. If **Mark Bode** has done twenty pages of humor for us, then we can't really use any more color humor by anybody else — but we might have a crying need for eleven pages of black-and-white drama. It's like that. So we have got to have always several issues worth in the drawer. The backlog problem at one time existed simply because a bunch of people who had promised to do work for us "some day" all delivered it at once! At the time, we were also hoping that EPIC would be going monthly, which wound up not happening. I think the Epic Comics and the many graphic novels we've done have been an alternative to the magazine being monthly. And the Epic Comics and the graphic novels also accounted for a lot of our material.

DWIGHT: *When you started in comics, the ratio of women creators — those active either as writers, artists, or even editors — in comics, was kind of lopsided in favor of the men.*

JO: I think, at that time, I was the only women working fulltime either writing, editing, or drawing super hero comics. There were some women on the staff in other jobs, and a lot of female colorists, but no one really at a title's helm. **Marie Severin** and **Paty** were both on Marvel's staff as artists, but they weren't contributing directly to the books. They were working on other parts of the operation, books and licensing. **Irene Vartanoff,** is a very talented writer and editor — but again, she was working in a more managerial position. DC had a woman as its publisher and no women in any creative capacity except coloring that I could detect whatsoever. **Wendy Pini** hadn't started doing ELFQUEST yet. And **Louise Jones** was editor-in-chief at Warren, but I wasn't really familiar with the Warren books. I was certainly the only women I knew of who was writing regular superhero work not created to be a "woman's book," thank you very much.

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JO DUFFY, EDITOR J. SHOOTER, ED-IN-CHIEF

Splash page for SHE-HULK #13, one of the first series Jo edited.

DWIGHT: *What is a "woman's book"? And what is not a woman's book?*

JO: Beats the shit out of me, but I know that management, at least at the time before I was employed, perceived a woman's book as THE CLAWS OF THE CAT, NIGHT NURSE, SHANNA THE SHE-DEVIL, with a female main character, to be written by women, drawn by women, if they could find any who were available, and sort of have women's viewpoints. I think all of them were also cancelled before they even had sales figures on them. I guess those books must have been, like, real turkeys.

DWIGHT: *What's supposed to be a woman's viewpoint?*

JO: Don't ask. Hey, you're talking to somebody who's written Hercules, and Wolverine, and the Hulk, and Power Man and Iron

HEY LOOK!

THE ICE-MEN ARE HERE.

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5 issue limited series

MACKENZIE QUEEN

MATRIX GRAPHIC SERIES

"I got flak for writing macho characters."

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Fist for three years — don't ask me what a woman's viewpoint is! I don't think I've ever written a story that spotlighted a female character. Except in STAR WARS. I'd be perfectly happy to — it's just been luck of the draw so far. I'm working on a graphic novel right now. It's going to be THE PUNISHER, a really feminine character.

DWIGHT: *Well, considering the fact that you've done all these macho characters, when you look back at the kind of work you've done — and I assume that you do kind of compare what you do with your compatriots in the industry — do you find a different approach to your kind of stories, because you happen to be a woman and the others happen to be men?*

JO: No. I know that some women have said that they do find it that way, but I never have. You know, it was one of these bizarre things where, for a while, there was actually a policy. Somebody above me established that he thought Mary Jo — the longer version of my name — was a pretty name and I should use it professionally. And I got a certain amount of flak about "What is this woman doing writing these macho characters?" Left to my own devices, by the time I joined EPIC, I dropped it back to Jo — which is what my friends have always called me, anyway — and I now get mail saying, "What is this man doing, he obviously doesn't know the first thing about women, the way he's writing them." I get a lot of that.

DWIGHT: *For those who have doubts, let me say that you're definitely a woman.*

JO: It's none of their business. I mean, if they're young, good-looking, single, male, then it's their business whether or not I'm a woman. If they're reading my stuff, it's all right for them to be interested, but I don't think it need concern them. If I've got three eyes, and green hair, and no gender whatsoever — so what? You like my work, I hope.

DWIGHT: *Well, that brings up the point where some fans, when they meet the creator of their favorite character, walk away disappointed. The image that they've created is so far removed from reality that it's best that they never do meet.*

JO: Four characters I recently put into STAR WARS, that I've been getting some good feedback on, I actually based on real people. It was one of the most delightful experiences of my life. I was at a convention in Chicago, and I was actually working on putting some teenage boys in STAR WARS. I was doing it because I had this race of sort of sex-crazed, fun-loving characters, the Zeltrons, and I had so far only done one male Zeltron and a bunch of females and I thought, what the heck — let's throw some males in, it's about time. I'm wrestling with this story, and these four boys came up to the table, and they met **Chris Claremont**. While they were talking to Chris, they were in a little cluster, and they kept pointing at me and looking, and pointing and looking, and going it *is* her, it's not her, yes it *is*, no it isn't. And then they came over and started talking to me. So after I signed autographs, and we had this wonderful chat, they strolled away, and I heard one of them say to the other, See, that *is* the lady who draws POWER PACK." *(Laughter.)*

An example of June Brigman's art on POWER PACK.

I called them back and kept them there for about two hours, listening to them talk, and watching the way they move, and just sort of pulling everything I could out of this —

DWIGHT: *That's the scene with Han Solo—*

JO: It's the introductory scene in STAR WARS #95. It's what these guys did to me. It's like how to build them up, just to knock them down. Well, it happened to me, so I figured what the heck, let's use it. But that's my favorite meeting with a fan to date, it really is.

DWIGHT: *And June Brigman was no doubt surprised —*

JO: That she was writing STAR WARS. Well June wasn't there. I think POWER PACK #2 was just out, and it was absolutely a smash, so, "It looks like a lady, she must do POWER PACK."

DWIGHT: *Right. Well, who's heard of STAR WARS, anyway? Actually, I've noticed that you've succeeded in returning Darth Vader in a number of different stories — also, you've been transforming him into something more than a person, to the point where he's now kind of a metaphor.*

JO: Well, I think villain-as-metaphor is what **Lucas** was always doing with Darth Vader. I like to think I'm just trying to do the stories I think **Lucas** would do — if he had to do it every month, instead of once every three years. The fact that Vader caught the public imagination so instantly, the moment he walked on camera the first time, shows he is a lot more than just a man, he is a lot more than just a villain — he is a force, and I don't mean that as a pun. The guy's a goddamned presence, and just because the physical's gone, doesn't mean the presence is gone. He is EVIL.

DWIGHT: *That's Vader, not Lucas. How much latitude does Lucasfilm allow you in character development? Specifically, the major characters?*

JO: Interestingly enough, less now than previously. I think there's really going to be some major stuff happening with the characters in the next movie — the one that George is working on now — because he's put restrictions on me that didn't exist between EMPIRE and RETURN OF THE JEDI. That kind of surprised me. I'm sort of allowed to explore what's already there, and kind of have the illusion of motion, without actually letting things move. It's one of the reasons I've thrown so much of my own creation into the book, and done so much exploration of what the previous writers, like **David Michelinie** and **Archie Goodwin**, have given me to work with. I'm dying to see the next movie, based on what **Lucas** won't let me do, because it must mean *he's* doing it.

DWIGHT: *At the end of RETURN OF THE JEDI, that was essentially supposed to be the last appearance of all these characters. Does this mean that we might actually see them in the next movie?*

JO: I don't know, but I suspect that if we don't see them, we're going to find out what's become of them, because of what I'm not allowed to do with some of them.

DWIGHT: *Okay, when you started developing your own characters, are you given free rein in those stories, or are there limits?*

JO: Lucasfilm has never said to me, "You can't do this, these are our characters." They never remarked on the fact that I've had one issue recently where the only character who'd ever appeared in any of the films was Luke,

"Comics is a minimalistic medium."

and we didn't show one piece of established STAR WARS hardware, except his own light-saber. And Lucasfilm passed it on by. In fact, they said they liked where I was taking it. By introducing things of our creation gradually into the STAR WARS universe over the last eight years, we've managed to make the stories creatively flow at least within the limits of the comic.

DWIGHT: *The STAR WARS series has so many different characters, and races — how do you keep them all straight? There's the Zeltrons, different races, and you have the Wookies and the others in there. Are you able to fairly easily keep them straight?*

JO: Totally. It's like what we were talking about earlier. Comics being a minimalistic medium, I have to have something I can skim off the top of anything. It's, like, Luke Skywalker is the best there is. Han is the best at what he does; he's not the brightest. Lando does the same thing Han does — but totally differently, because he'd rather do it stylishly and sneakily, instead of full speed ahead and yelling. So I do that with those characters. And then the civilizations. I need someone very civilized and level-headed, I go for the Hoojibs, which is another plus because they're cute. If I need somebody sort of silly, and cute, I go for the Lahsbees; I would have gone for the Ewoks, but they have their own comic now. And I created the Lahsbees before I knew the Ewoks were going to exist. If I need people who are very, very innocent, and kind of artistic, but not practical at all, I go with the Iskalonians, who are the water breathers. Again, if I want fun, and a lot of patter, and somebody who can unbalance our characters: Zeltrons. Evil? Nagai. Incompetent evil? The Hiromi cockroaches of space. And I feel very bad about that, by the way. Before I knew they were

going to be a running gag, I named the Hiromi after one of my favorite singers in the world, and I hope he never finds out that there's a bunch of STAR WARS bugs named after him.

DWIGHT: *Oh no!* (Laughter.) *To borrow the question from Luke Skywalker that he uttered in STAR WARS #93 — what is going on in the galaxy?*

JO: Okay, STAR WARS #93 has been out for a while now. For those of you who don't read STAR WARS, I'll give you my establishing shot here, like a good comic-book writer: What we've done is, since the third movie killed off the Emperor, and presumably wrapped up the battle with the Empire for the survivors, what I did was say, "Okay, how do you top the biggest thing that ever happened? You bring in a bigger enemy!"

The Nagai are people who are as cool and as evil as I could create them, with the help of **Tony Salmons**, who designed the first Nagai we ever saw, and **Cynthia Martin**, who's designed the entire rest of the civilization. And what they've done is team up with anybody who's discontented with the new order in the galaxy, and of course the new order hasn't had time to get going yet. They're still watching the dust clear. There are Nagai outposts all over our galaxy. The Nagai are from next door, waiting for their chance — and now they're starting. It's kind of like what political historians tell us what was going on in Europe after World War II where, the minute **Hitler** fell, everybody started looking for what they could get — and even while people were at the peace table negotiating with each other, there were things being done to knife each other in the back.

DWIGHT: *Everybody was jockeying for position.*

JO: That's what's going on in the galaxy — and the reason Luke was asking, "What's going on here?" was to let people know that *I* knew what was going on — and was about to tell them in an issue or so.

DWIGHT: *Well, we're at the end of the tape, so Jo's final comments are fortunes from the fortune cookies here. The first one is, "A plant with strong roots will always grow back," and "To do what you want and enjoy it is what one calls freedom."*

JO: Personally, I think someone in the back was listening to you talk about your experiences in Georgia before you started the interview and how they enriched you as a creator, and listening to me talk about my comics career. That's why we got those two fortunes. Although how they knew which of us would get which cookie, I can't guess.

WELL, MAYBE HE CAN TELL US WHAT HAPPENED HERE, AND WHO THOSE OTHER PILOTS WERE.
WON'T THE BOYS BE PROUD OF ME? THEY LET ME OUT ON MY OWN, AND I COME BACK WITH A PRISONER.

Above and top: Princess Leia captures one of the dread Nagai in STAR WARS #103, art by Cynthia Martin and Art Nichols.

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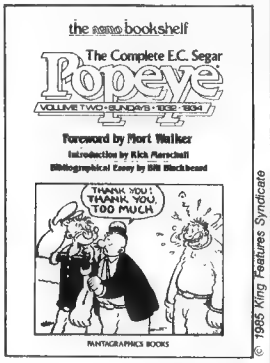
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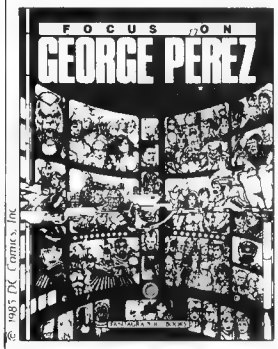

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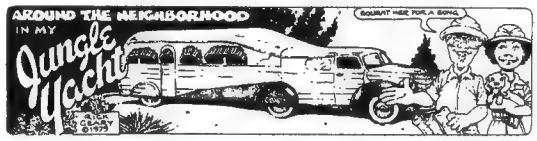

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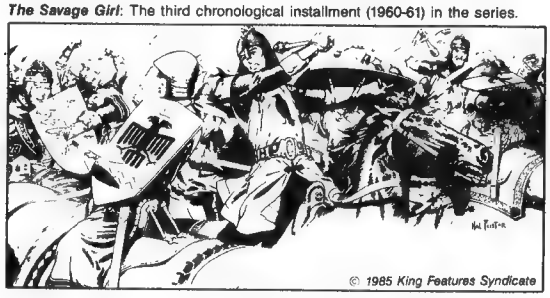

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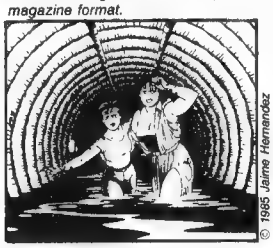

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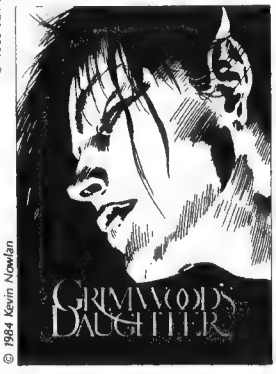

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LAST WORD

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WHAT SHOT DOWN D'ARC TANGENT

Hi, Dave:

Despite **Phil Foglio**'s statements to that effect, D'ARC TANGENT didn't cease production because he discovered I was erasing his pencils and redrawing them.

Phil and I were collaboraters. In the early days we naively thought that meant we could split things up 50-50 at every level — plot, script, pencils, inks, etc. In actual practice, we discovered our styles just didn't mesh that way, and I ended up doing more and more of the work. (It's important to remember here that D'ARC TANGENT was more than just Phil and me; publisher/editor **Melissa Ann Singer** and plot/art assistant **M. Lucie Chin** each put two years of hard work into the story's structure and appearance. These aren't talentless nobodies we're talking, here. Melissa is currently horror editor for TOR Books, and was then SF editor for Berkeley Books, while Lucie has just sold her first novel, a Chinese fantasy, to Ace. They deserve a lot more credit for D'ARC TANGENT than they ever got in public.

Our earliest notion about the pencils was that Phil would concentrate on the aliens and robots and I would concentrate on the humanoids and settings. In practice, Phil never drew things the same way twice...which works in slapstick like MYTH-ADVENTURES and BUCK GODOT, but not in a serious SF story. He did not use reference sheets, so his characters routinely changed height, width, and number of limbs from one panel to the next. He threw in Coca-Cola logos, smiley faces, and other jokes instead of drawing what we'd planned. He tried to use flashy sound effects in place of things he couldn't draw.

That's the way it was. Whenever Phil would give up on fixing his share of a page, Lucie and I would have no choice but to tackle it. Sometimes we succeeded, and sometimes we didn't. But it was *always* with his knowledge, right from the beginning.

So what shot down D'ARC TANGENT? The rest of the team remembers vividly. We'd heard distrubing rumors that Phil was trying to sell the book to another publisher behind our backs. At a partnership meeting in December, 1983, we asked him if those rumors were true. He said they were, that he had talked with a lawyer, that our partnership was invalid and therefore the book was all his...and he left the room whistling.

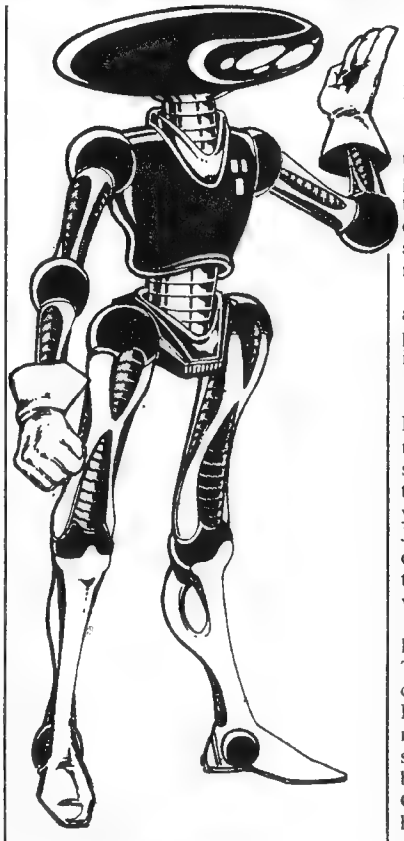
Shortly after that Melissa and I got our own lawyers and the battle began.

As I write this, a settlement is finally being drawn up. When its terms are finalized and it is signed the war will be over. Which will please me. So far what Phil refers to as "legal talk-talk" has cost all of us a lot of money. But it has been worth it, both for anecdotes (like the letter his lawyer sent claiming Phil had creator's rights — no fooling — in the Catholic priesthood) and for the bottom line: the settlement that is being drawn up is *fair*, based as it is on the fact that D'ARC TANGENT was and is a jointly-created and owned property.

In the future people should be able to compare my drawings and novels with Phil's drawings and comic books, and judge for themselves who was the real creator of D'ARC TANGENT...him, me, or some mix of our best faces that has since self-destructed and will never be seen again.

He's a very talented man, and I'm glad he's doing well with MYTH-ADVENTURES. But I do wish he'd think before he speaks.

Cheers,
Freff



D'ARC TANGENT...will the legal dust soon settle?

NOTES FROM AN OLD WHIPPERSNAPPER

Dear DAK:

Many thanks for the magazines.

What you young whippersnappers are up to is clear enough. You're putting old whippersnappers to shame. How can we maintain the legend that we knew what we were doing when you are doing it better? If my self image was going down any faster, I'd need a parachute.

I also read your editorial detailing the amount of work you've accomplished in the past year or so. I've taken to my bed suffering from terminal languor.

In other words, congratulations.

Concerning the upcoming interview **Lou Mougin** did with me, I've sent a photo (of my wife Joanna and me) to Lou, which should reproduce well in your magazine, though no doubt using my photo will cause your circulation to plunge precipitously. Joanna's photo may help matters. I decided to send some snapshots also which, if they are reproducible, micht have some visual interest.

As for artwork, I don't have any. I believe **Steranko** has a copy of MAD HATTER magazine, drawn by **Mort Leav**. The cover might be useful. This was a magazine I published, until the price of newsprint made it impractical. Other suggestions: A sequence in an old BLACKHAWK drawn by **Reed Crandall** in a story about King Cobra, a villain I invented. It showed Blackhawk leaping from a plane wing as the plane was about to crash, whizzing around a tree branch and winding up in a haystack. Most improbable, but damn, if **Reed** didn't make it seem almost believable.

Then there was a Captain Marvel story about the Trumpet of Doom, and DC reprinted the title page. This also appeared in Fawcett's SEE magazine (a LOOK and LIFE imitation) back in 1942 when they did a story on comics and used my story for illustration. I don't think any of this is findable, but somehow people like you and Lou seem able to come up with anything.

I'm enclosing the title page of an old SUPERMAN manuscript that **Jim Steranko** somehow discovered. (I also include a copy of **Steranko**'s note.) The cross-outs on the Superman ms are mine, the added words are **Mort Weisinger**'s.

One other possibility. I just wrote a SUPERMAN story (the first in 34 years!) for **Julie Schwartz**, and that might be in artwork shortly. How all this came about is a long story beginning with DC sending me a small check for residuals. I called **Paul Levitz**, we had lunch, I met Julie and...but you don't want to know the rest of this. I happened to know you don't have time to read maundering missives.

I'm going back to bed now and think about the past which is, after all, where I spent most of my life. You will never again find **Woolfolk** rampant on a field of activity.

Bill Woolfolk
New Canaan, CT

Thanks for the letter and the pix, Bill! We're sure our readers are eagerly awaiting your interview. As one of the legends of comics, you've earned your languor!
— DAK

RIGHT ON TARGET

Dear DAK:

Applause for the *excellent* interview with **Collins** and **Beatty**. Having met and conversed with this creative team, I'm pleased to say the interview is right on target. These guys are two of the nicest in comics, as well as professional to the fingertips. Thanks to **Peter B. Gillis** for letting Max and Terry "expand" upon all aspects of their teamwork.

Barb Rausch
1701 Nichols Cyn #104
Hollywood, CA 90046

FUN-TO-READ CHATS

David:

They say there is a first time for everything. Well, there I was in my favorite bookstore (ususally the one I'm in at that moment) when I saw COMICS INTERVIEW #21. I had heard of your publication way back when, but was never in the postion to buy one. So when I saw the copy of the issue, and I had three bucks that just wasn't doing anything, I bought it. (And got 75¢ change — didn't want you to think they were hiking prices or anything).

I'm sure you based this magazine on the idea that the interview section of THE COMICS JOURNAL and other such fanzines is usually the favorite section of the magazine. You'll get no disagreements from this end, but while reading #21 I sort of felt like I needed to read some idiotically written news piece, or some nice Sunday paperish features. Whoever lays out your magazine does an excellent job, because page upon page of PLAYBOY-style interviews can be boring.

The interviews had a nice variety of people — although I would have preferred seeing an interview with a writer or editor instead of the two artist interviews. (The **Kelley Jones** and **Rick Hoberg** interviews were different enough in slant that it makes my comment seem like so much nit picking, but as a perspiring writer I would have rather read an interview with someone who has nothing to do with pencils and inks.)

A couple of your interviews bring up an idea that I think would work well for this magazine. You managed to have interviews with **Mike Saenz** and **Jon King** — two ends of the same spectrum (computer technology in comics), yet you did not do the natural thing! Maybe it would have been hard to pull off, but I would have loved to have read the results of the two of them being in one room with a moderator and about four hours worth of blank tapes and one tape recorder.

Or **Kelley Jones** with **Matt Jorgensen**! Gad, that would have beaten the smurf out of anything any of your competitors could have done. We have **Kelley Jones** who believes that comics are boiled down to fun, and **Matt Jorgensen** who may believe the same thing but has a different idea of what fun is. **Matt Jorgensen** is throwing names around that I haven't heard since Frosh Art Appreciation, while **Kelley Jones** treats **John Byrne** like a pop culture idol. Just take a look at their pictures and they look like exact opposites.

And that would have made a chat segment fun to read. Sure interviews can be fun to read, but after the first two it can get boring: question, followed by answer, followed by question. A good interviewer should not concentrate so much on prepared questions, as I feel some of your interviewers have done, but have a nice little chat. Mainly because once the folks relax they say things you might not get them to say normally.

But a 'chat' segment between **Kelley Jones** and **Matt Jorgensen** would have been fun to read. They were so opposite in opinions and beliefs that putting the two of them

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

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in a room could have led to a great discussion. Or an out and out fight. (Matt looks like he knows what to do with that sword.)

That's the whole idea. Yeah, I kinda borrowed it from the Kitchen Sink's THE SPIRIT, where **Will Eisner** manages to corral someone to talk with every issue. (Or at least when I was reading the book.) **Eisner** doesn't interview the person — the two just talk about art, and comics, and whatever else comes to mind.

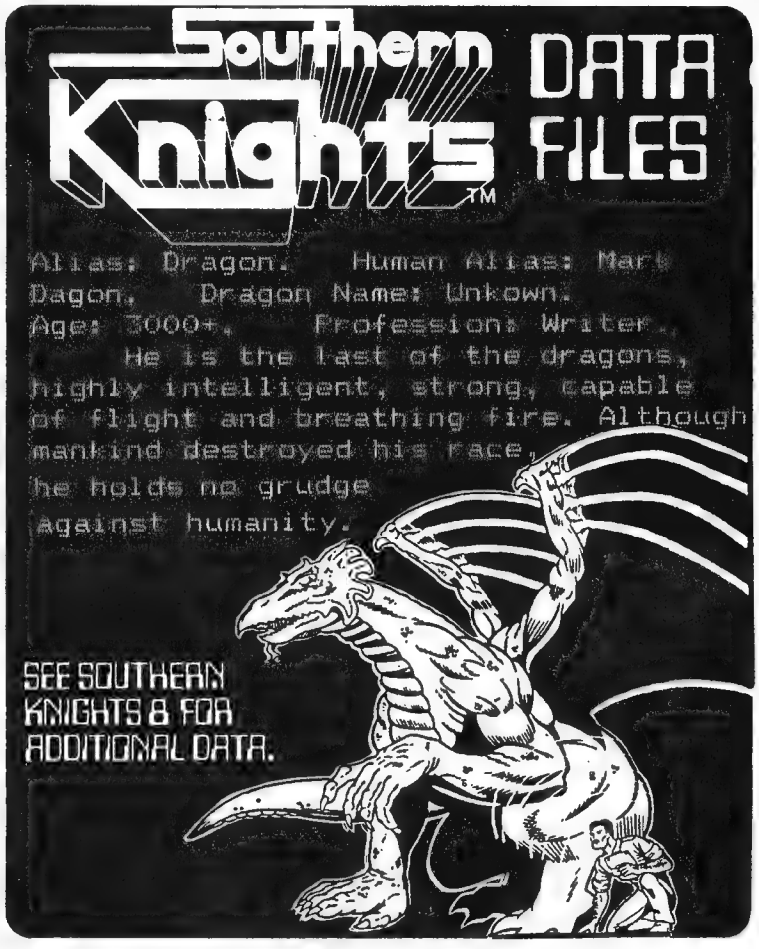
That is what COMICS INTERVIEW needs: One interview that doesn't have the formal feel of your other interviews. Just a nice chat that could turn into a spirited discussion that would get fans thinking.

But COMICS INTERVIEW #21 was enjoyable enough that my first time won't be my last time.

Mike Sopp
438 West 32
Erie, PA 16508-1744

If you like unrefereed chats, Mike, check out issue #8, for a lively, thought-provoking chat between writers Mike Baron (of NEXUS and BADGER fame) and Steve Grant (creator of WHISPER). And if you go for completely unstructured gabfests, the behind-the-scenes editor/writer confab (featuring Mike Barr, Roger Slifer and yours truly, as we plot the history-making WORLD'S FINEST #300), in the same issue, should be just what you're after! But for sheer unbuttoned, free-wheeling (not to mention "zany," "hilarious," etc.) repartee, don't miss the Steve Leialoha "interview" (we use the term loosely, in this instance) in issue #10. . . or the anarchic antics of the Chambana Comix Club in issue #20. We like to have even our "formal" interviews (not that there's really *anything "formal" about COMICS INTERVIEW!) as relaxed and chatty as can be!*

— DAK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Alias: Dragon. Human Alias: Mark Dagon. Dragon Name: Unkown.
Age: 3000+. Profession: Writer.
He is the last of the dragons, highly intelligent, strong, capable of flight and breathing fire. Although mankind destroyed his race, he holds no grudge against humanity.
SEE SOUTHERN KNIGHTS 8 FOR ADDITIONAL DATA.

NO DUNGBALLS FOR SHOOTER

Dear David,

First, on behalf of freedom-loving people everywhere, thank you for your face-on reply to the absurd, twisted, and generally offensive letter from **T. M. Maple**. The threat to liberty posed by censorship is so basic, so fundamental, that some among us cannot seem to conceive it, and most of the rest of us lack the ability to accurately describe it. From this day on, I WILL be able to, thanks to your skill. Consider your response stolen, because I will be proud to use it. And to Mr/Ms **Maple**, you run when none chase. No one would have thought less of you had you simply admitted that a struggling comic shop (and they all struggle) doesn't have the power to fight with the government over the question of obscenity and has to play it safe and pull the book. That lack of power is the government's shame, not yours, and it is lacking because it was given over to bureaucrats by those who rationalized just as you have.

ENOUGH! On to the comic talk!

Without pointing fingers at anyone in specific, let me say that I'm really fed up with these constant attacks on Marvel. And what looks like some sort of class-action vendetta against **Jim Shooter** personally. Not only are these Shooter-Shots tasteless and socially repugnant (how's that for mincing words?), but they are generally totally irrelevent. Here we have unsubstantiated rumors being reported that Jim is going to remake the Marvel Universe in his own image, as a hush falls over the nation and the stock-market plunges. Folks, the structure of the Marvel Universe is his job — he's the Managing Editor! If he decides it must change, that's his responsibility and his right. Let's face it, **Shooter**'s been at the helm longer than **Stan Lee** was. (No offense, Stan.) Now, he'd better be right about whatever he monkeys with, or he'll own me a personal explanation, 'cause I've been with Marvel longer than he has. But let's not be throwing dungballs at the man in anticipation.

As for the "...little f**s..." hubbub, in all the sound and fury of trying to pin the blame on someone, we've overlooked the most important question, which is: "So what?" Even assuming that Jim actually did write and distribute the memo (which I do) the question still remains, "So what?" The man wears a suit and works in an office with other people in suits and still has to deal with writers and artists, who wear beards. (Except for the ladies, but you get the idea.) They are both delightful groups in their own way, but if you or I had to act as the conduit connecting them, we'd want to make a cynical joke from time to time ourselves. Besides which I thought the memo was funny as hell. I only wish MY boss had a sense of humor.

All those years ago when I bought the first issue of FANTASTIC FOUR, SPIDER-MAN, THE X-MEN and the rest of the roots from which Marvel has sprung, I was adding those revolutionary works to an already burgeoning stack of TALES OF SUSPENSE, TALES TO ASTONISH, etc. Through the years I have followed the Marvel characters through thick and thin, and they have been a part of my life. Today I buy Marvel Comics pretty exclusively. Oh, there are a few non-Marvel books I read and enjoy (mostly independents), but only because suddenly I find muself thirty-five years old and able to afford them. So, yes, I'm more a Marvel fan than a "comics fan." Mind, though, that the vast majority of readers are inevitably either Marvel fans or DC fans, and (hold on to your sacred cows, folks) that is how it should be. Notice that

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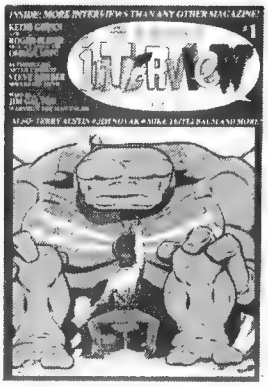
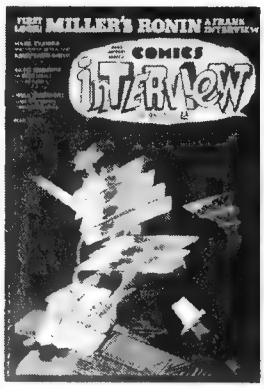
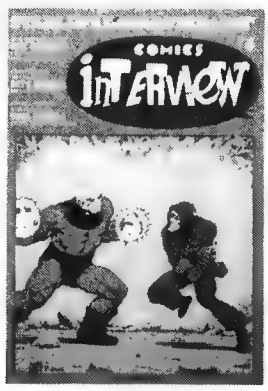


#1-$3.00 **Keith Giffen** on the making of THE OMEGA MEN — **Steve Gerber** speaks out on comics — X-MEN inker **Terry Austin** talks — Marvel's top man, **Jim Galton**, tells all — and much more in this premiere issue!



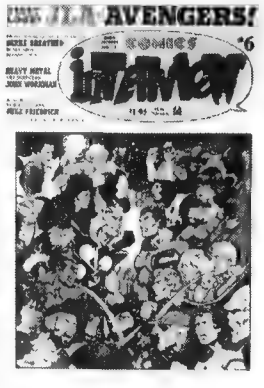
#2-$3.00 **Miller** raps about RONIN — **Mark Evanier** shares secrets of **Kirby's** NEW GODS — **Steve Gerber** asks **Will Meugniot** about DNAGENTS — **Gene Simmons** of KISS on comics — more! Cover by **Frank Miller.**

#3-$3.00 **Don McGregor & Craig Russell** on KILLRAVEN — Origins of NEW TEEN TITANS told by **Marv Wolfman** — **Howard Chaykin** on AMERICAN FLAGG — French comics by **Neal Adams** — Cover by **Russell.**

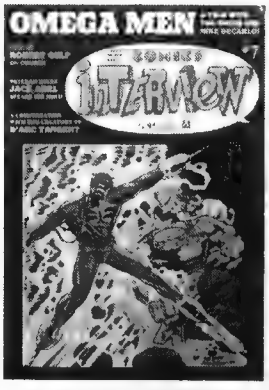


#4-$3.00 **Starlin** speaks about **WARLOCK, CAPTAIN MARVEL & DREADSTAR — DC's Dick Giordano**, part 1 — from **Foster** to **Frazetta**, the last **Roy G. Krenkel** interview — Cover by **Starlin.**

#5-$3.00 **Wendy & Richard Pini** — inside ELFQUEST, part 1 — **Stan Lee**, straight from the shoulder — DC's **Dick Giordano** part 2 — Origins of COMICO. Cover by **Wendy Pini.**

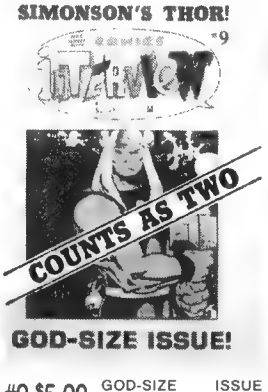


#6-$3.00 **George Perez & Roy Thomas** tell all about JLA/AVENGERS feud — inside ELFQUEST, part 2 — **Berke Breathed** blabs about BLOOM COUNTY — more! Awesome cover by **Perez!**

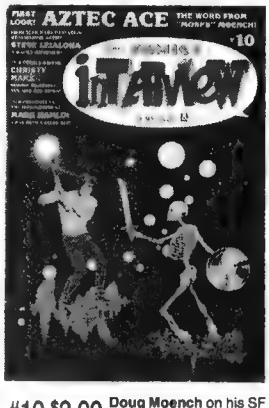


#7-$3.00 Artist **Tod Smith** — inker **Mike DeCarlo**, too — D'ARC TANGENT — TV star **Robert Culp** talks about comics — Marvel artist **Jack Abel** OMEGA MEN cover by **Smith & DeCarlo!**

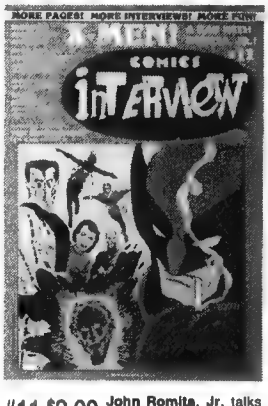
#8-$3.00 **Mike Baron** and **Steve Grant** discuss NEXUS, WHISPER and BADGER — **Bill Griffith** talks about ZIPPY THE PINHEAD — **Richard Burton** on British comics — plus more! Cover by **Steve Rude.**



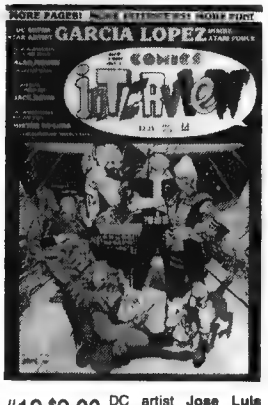
#9-$5.00 GOD-SIZE ISSUE **Walt Simonson**, the man and his art — grand master **Joe Kubert** gabs — A walk down memory lane with comics giant **Gardner Fox** — much, much more!! THOR cover by **Simonson.**



#10-$3.00 **Doug Moench** on his SF series — from **Starlin** to STAR WARS, a wacky interview with **Steve Leialoha** — **Christy Marx** on women, sex and RED SONJA — more! ACE cover by **Hernandez & Yeates.**



#11-$3.00 **John Romita, Jr.** talks about Marvel from IRON MAN to X-MEN — **Doug Moench** (part two) on his stormy career and the state of comics — inside Pacific Comics — more! X-MEN cover by **Romita!**



#12-$3.00 DC artist **Jose Luis Garcia Lopez** (TEEN TITANS, ATARI FORCE) — EC artist **Jack Davis** — TV's **Mr. Rogers** — star scripter **Alan Moore** talks about superheroes — **Louise Simonson** — more!

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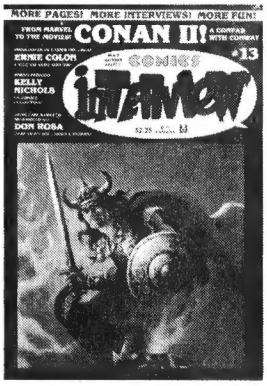
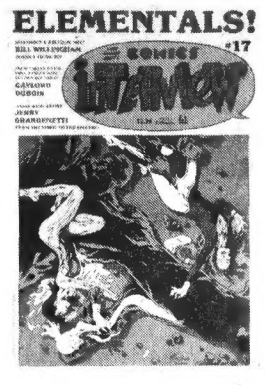


#13-$3.00 **Gerry Conway & Roy Thomas** sound off on scripting movies (Conan, Fire & Ice) and comics — a two-fisted talk with outspoken artist **Ernie Colon** — porn star **Kelly Nichols** — **Don Rosa** — more!

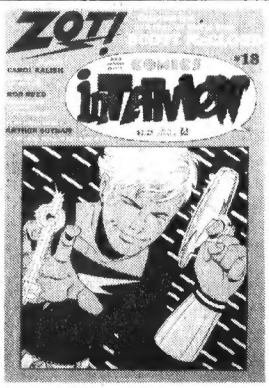
#14-$3.00 **Jim Shooter** talks about SECRET WARS! **Gary Groth** of COMICS JOURNAL! Scripter **Steve Englehart** sounds off on SILVER SURFER and other surprises! SECRET WARS cover by **Mike Zeck!**

#15-$3.00 Co-creators **John Ostrander & Tim Truman** on GRIMJACK! VOID INDIGO artist **Val Mayerik! Richard Pini & Colleen Doran** on A DISTANT SOIL! Great cover by **Truman!**

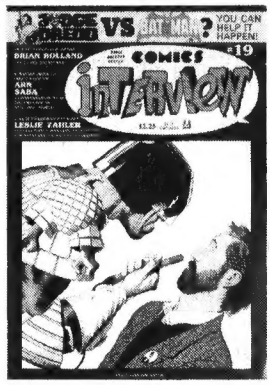
#16-$3.00 THE LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES! Writer — and DC Vice President — **Paul Levitz**, and artist **Dan Jurgens** — DOOM PATROL creator & original X-MEN writer **Arnold Drake** rattles skeletons at DC!



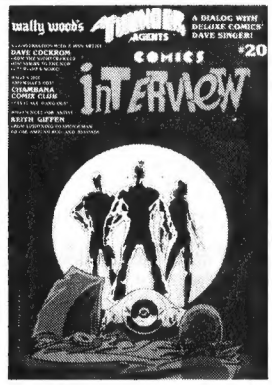
#17-$3.00 THE ELEMENTALS! Creator **Bill Willingham** talks about this super-group! **Jerry Grandenetti** his years with **Will Eisner!** — Golden Age great **Gaylord DuBois.** Cover by **Bill Willingham**



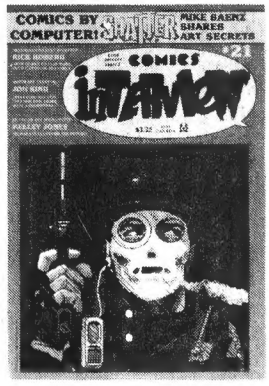
#18-$3.00 ZOT! writer/artist **Scott McCloud!** A rap with original CAPTAIN MARVEL writer & Golden Age great **Rod Reed** — HEAVY METAL artist **Arthur Suydam** — Marvel's **Carol Kalish!**



#19-$3.00 British artist **Brian Bolland** breaks the silence about the secret BATMAN VERSUS JUDGE DREDD project he and **Alan Moore** have been working on! COMIC BUYERS GUIDE's **Don & Maggie**



#20-$3.00 AMBUSH BUG alumnus **Keith Giffen** and X-MEN artist **Dave Cockrum** — publisher **Dave Singer** about the T.H.U.N.D.E.R. AGENTS — news of the NIGHTCRAWLER mini-series



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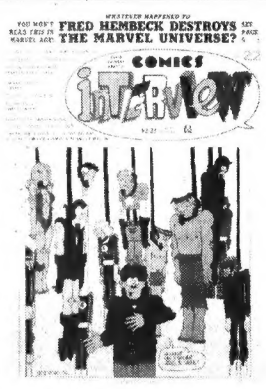

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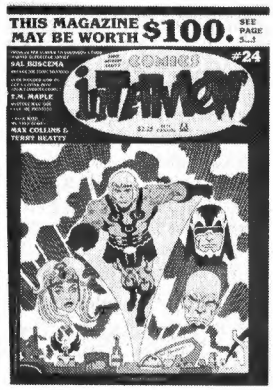

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I do not say "all" but "the vast majority" of readers, because it is from these tributaries that the mainstream springs.

In the theatre, Broadway is the mainstream that supplies entertainment to the mass of theatre-goers, while Off-Broadway troupes and productions supply the talent, the vision, that will become the very IDENTITY of the Theatre itself in years to come. The mainstream of entertainment, whether in theatre or comics, is given direction and impetus by the experimental work of independent creators who succeed in striking a responsive chord in the minds of the public and teaching us to take their work to our hearts. Of course, Marvel and DC aren't the mainstream by divine right, and as the comics scene changes Eclipse, First — who knows? — even Charlton, could become the big kids on the block. Then, naturally, they will also become the mainstream boogyman, and we'll all be taking pot-shots at *them* and asking people to buy Marvel and DC books out of a sense of obligation to the independents.

Sure, it's tough to make it against the competition of powerful forces like these two giants, but it is the giants that must be beaten at their own game. They can try to crowd the racks with titles, to keep the independents out, but it won't work if they aren't the titles readers want. One of the independent titles on the rack right now may be the one that sets a new standard for comics; but its success must come from its own quality — not from easier competition.

All I ask is that we as thoughtful and sensitive fans retain a sense of prespective. The Big Two aren't bad just because they *are* the Big Two. They are what they are because they are the best in their business according to the only measure that counts: the number of books sold, pure and simple. There may be (and are) books with greater insight, more courage, higher creativity; but they will not be the best until the buying public says they are. For art has a function beyond entertainment, and that is to educate the viewer to appreciate what it says. The public that does not understand or appreciate the work has not been educated by the artist.

My opinion is that the comics industry is healthier than it has ever been. The market is dominated by two companies of immense power but there is springing up a strong and creative grassroots challenge by men and women who TRULY BELIEVE they can do better. They may be right. Time will tell. Meanwhile, as a member of the mass of consumers, I will continue to buy the titles I enjoy most, whatever they may be.

Mark J. Brown
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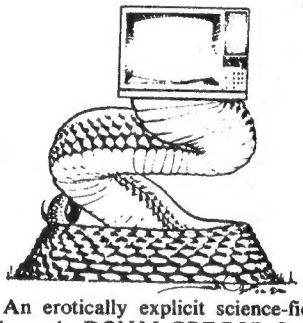

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